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## Refusing Interpretation: Waste Ecologies in Victorian Fiction and Prose

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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# Abstract

## Refusing Interpretation: Waste Ecologies in Victorian Fiction and Prose

This dissertation examines the waste ecologies that appear in Victorian literature, from the canonical realist novel, to the Irish Imperial Gothic ghost story, and to practical prose works on garden designs and amateur horticulture. Specifically, I discuss two of Dickens's novels, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) and *Bleak House* (1853), alongside Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "Green Tea" (1869) and a selection of William Robinson's horticultural prose and journalism that appeared between 1869 and 1892. The primary texts examined in this dissertation all suggest a profound fascination with and awe of emergent and complex ecological structures over self-contained, ordered systems. My chapters can be grouped conceptually into two halves: the first dealing with Dickens's representation of social structures that function as large and small waste ecologies; the second, with the individual interactions with waste ecologies that in Le Fanu's and Robinson's works manifest as both occult and apocalyptic. Chapter 1 reads *Our Mutual Friend* for the strange material entanglements surrounding the Harmon dust-heaps and the Thames, offering a portrait of waste that is uncontainable, is uncategorizable, and develops agency. Chapter 2 takes up *Bleak House*'s depiction of three social systems that function as waste ecologies—Krook's rag-and-bottle shop, the High Court of Chancery, and Tom-all-Alone's—as loci of excessive accumulated material that in their rampant proliferation objectify, devalue, and homogenize everything within. Chapter 3 examines "Green Tea," which depicts the human body's spectral reaction when it itself is the intersection of the indigestible waste ecologies involving the contaminated tea panic, the counterfeit tea trade, and the mingled nationalism and Orientalism orbiting a product of imperial trade that was both prized and held in suspicion. Chapter 4 takes up Robinson's prose and follows the logic of his aesthetic to the inevitable conclusion that human life cannot truly join the garden ecology except in death. Moving from broad ecosystems that influence all of Victorian London down to the individual British subject, tea-drinker, or plant, this project situates waste ecologies at the rich analytical intersections of Victorian literary criticism, the new materialisms, and the environmental humanities.

## Keywords

Dickens, Charles; Ecologies in waste; Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan; Material ecocriticism; Nineteenth-century literature (England); Robinson, William.

## Summary for Lay Audience

This dissertation begins with the problem of waste in Victorian England (1837-1901). The rapid and large-scale urbanization and industrialization of cities like London led to massive challenges relating to the containment and disposition of waste in all its forms: human sewage, animal excrement, discarded household effects, industrial equipment, and the continual smoke and soot from coal fires kept up in homes and in factories. Waste affected English society at virtually every level and in every location. My project analyses how waste and its complex impacts are imagined in Victorian English fiction and non-fiction, focusing on two novels by Charles Dickens, a ghost story by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and the books and journalism of the Irish-born horticulturist William Robinson. My analysis reveals in these authors' work an unexpectedly complex understanding of waste and of our social and environmental relationships to waste. I offer the term "waste ecology" to define and assess these understandings of waste that so profoundly shaped these written works. The dissertation ends, like the beginning, with the problem of waste, but with this difference: waste is a concept that challenges us to revisit how we determine value, how we relate to our environment, and how the things that we reject as waste can lead to new growth.

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## Introduction

In “The Decay of Lying” (1889), Oscar Wilde claims that, “people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects” (41). This image of Victorian London drowned in smoke and fog is, it is worth noting, first and foremost an image of waste, emanating from Londoners’ daily practices of consumption. The same fog that “poets and painters” admired for its melancholic beauty was produced by the Thames, which by the mid-nineteenth century was effectively an open cesspool. This vaporized filth in turn compounded the effects of other waste, often fusing with chimney soot to further pollute the city’s atmosphere. According to Michelle Allen, while the filth of London was not a new phenomenon, by the nineteenth century, the combination of the city’s unprecedented population growth, a series of cholera, typhoid, and typhus outbreaks, and the miasmatic theory of disease—which held that the poisonous air of waste-filled environments were behind those outbreaks—all imbued the problems posed by urban waste with a new urgency for Victorians (9-10). Nor were Victorian Londoners under any illusions about the waste deposited into the river, air, and streets after the Great Stink of 1858, in which unusually hot, still summer weather intensified the stench of the raw sewage that mingled with the Thames. And yet this waste-filled topography held an irresistible attraction. Pip’s first impression of London in *Great Expectations* (1861) involves a similar warring of attraction and repulsion: “We Britons had at that time particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything: otherwise, while I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty” (457). Later in the century, in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), Dr. Watson expresses a similar ambivalence, describing London as “that great cesspool into which all loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained” (7). Crowning it the origin of growth, development, and accomplishment, Doyle views London as a place of stagnation, of festering waste, that has nonetheless an irresistible draw. Victorians had, as we still do, a fraught relationship with waste. It is on this complex interrelation—among waste, environment, activity, attachments, and aesthetics—that this project will focus.

Waste oscillates between the quaint and the repulsive, the reusable and the stubbornly useless. The complex, contradictory relationships that this dissertation considers as waste cannot be reduced to filth, refuse, and debris alone. Rather, I read waste as a situation—as a relationship between objects that might defile, as a productive disorganization. Victorian urban waste-spaces were not simply containers of filth and refuse; they gave rise to ecosystems and economies of waste. Dustmen and watermen could earn a subsistence income for clearing away rubbish or sewage, respectively, and for selling these wares as agricultural fertilizers (Maidment 10). The central London sewage system also afforded some scanty means to “sewer-hunters,” or scavenging groups who braved the floods, biohazards, and rats of the sewer system in search of discarded valuables (Mayhew 137). The entire city was covered in and characterized by this waste, whether the ash and soot of domestic hearths, or the noxious mists that rose from the heavily polluted Thames. Victorians did not simply live amongst waste; they engaged with waste and some even relied on or thrived upon waste. Defining these waste environments is the core interest of this dissertation. This dissertation’s central concern lies in exploring waste ecologies—constructs that necessarily resist systematization and clear boundaries.

Defining a waste environment poses some unique challenges, due partly to the plentiful and dispersed discourses that current cultural studies have brought to bear upon waste. Waste sits at the centre of a definitional ecology as complex as the organic and inorganic structures it evokes. In 1966, Mary Douglas famously defined dirt as “matter out of place,” a phrase that launched the long subsequent tradition that conceives of waste as marginal, as categorically rebellious, and as antithetical to order and to classification (2). Michael Thompson’s anthropological study, *Rubbish Theory* (1979), relies on this characterization of waste when he casts the rubbish object as a liminal category of commodity culture. Thompson’s rubbish is an object that wavers between transient and enduring social value. Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject in *Powers of Horror* (1982) marks another milestone in the conceptualization of waste and is responsible for the use of “abject” as a household word within critical theory almost forty years after its emergence. Kristeva’s definition of the abject as a loathsome, “jettisoned object” (2)—or even “a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (2)—functions essentially as a description of waste: “what is *abject* . . . is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (2). Peter Schwenger’s *Tears of Things*

(2006) would later build upon Kristeva's formulation and cement its relation to waste in his reading of the human corpse as a liminal boundary between subject and object, still "bear[ing] the imprint of a residual subjectivity, residue within residue" (157). In the same year, Gay Hawkins's *The Ethics of Waste* (2006)—which reframes human-waste relations as a global and environmental problem and is still influential for its central claim of "the mutual constitution of human subjects and inanimate wasted objects" (2-3)—examines such diverse wastes as discarded plastics, feces, empty bottles, and worms.

More recently, scholars have delved deeper into this awareness of our material and culturally mediated relations to waste. In the last ten years, scholarly work in both the new materialisms and ecocriticism have seized upon the dynamic analytical potential of waste. Mel Chen and Maurizia Boscagli, for instance, developed respective theories for navigating the complex materialist relations enabled by cultural narratives of toxins and garbage. The developing field of what some call waste studies has responded in kind, bringing a material ecocritical attention to complexes of commercial, organic, industrial, and chemical wastes. In a 2008 issue of *PMLA*, Patricia Yaeger proposed a theory of "rubbish ecology" that carries forward a conservationist approach to garbage and aesthetics, and which she defines "as the act of saving and savouring debris" (329). Heather Sullivan's "dirt theory" casts waste as a problem of material ecocriticism,<sup>1</sup> highlighting the mobile and unmanageable processes of dirt and its entanglements with "small-scale ecological processes that are themselves integrated into larger niches of other assemblages" (516). Also in the past decade, waste studies has steadily permeated literary criticism, from Susan Morrison's Chaucerian "fecopoetics" (2), to Patrick Chappell's reading of the Victorian realist novel through Thompson's rubbish theory, and Jesse Oak Taylor's mapping of the history of atmospheric pollution through British novels from the mid-nineteenth- to twentieth-century in *The Sky of Our Manufacture* (2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann coined the term "material ecocriticism" in their 2012 article, "Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych," which champions the methodological compatibility of two bodies of critical theory—the environmental humanities and the new materialisms—that had already begun to emerge in the scholarship of both fields. Iovino and Oppermann would soon afterward release their edited collection of material ecocritical scholarship, *Material Ecocriticism*, in 2014.

These scholars, with their diverse contributions to waste studies, serve as the foundation for this dissertation. The ways in which theorists like Kristeva or literary critics like Sullivan explore the abject or dirt external to systems of value, for instance, are integral to my own interest in the limits of such systems. However, we may also measure the extent of the uncertainty and lack of definition by the diversity of these critics' approaches to waste. That these critical approaches to waste form an ecology of complex, overlapping, contradictory, and yet mutually constitutive discourses is suggestive. There is no coherent, comprehensive understanding of waste. The scholarship of waste has a long history that includes everything from dirt, debris, bodies, and excrement to garbage, chemical toxins, and atmospheric pollution—all distinct categories that nonetheless seem to bleed into one another and are freely interrelated by the scholars who take them up. As Morrison writes, “[i]nherent to waste’s identity (indeed, waste could be said to be that which has no identity) is its ability to slip away from one single, clearly articulated designation” (9). The language of waste was as polysemic, as fragmented, in the nineteenth century as it is in cultural studies today. Waste was part of a broad discursive nexus in the Victorian period and sat at the fraught interstices of several historical reforms and debates. Of the major connotations of waste throughout the nineteenth century, however, the four most relevant to this dissertation are sewage waste, vital waste, moral waste, and entropic waste.

Perhaps the nineteenth century’s most intuitive use of “waste,” at least for the modern reader, was in reference to sewage.<sup>2</sup> Without a standardized waste disposal system, London faced a crisis of sanitation by the mid-nineteenth century. The inevitable and unprecedented consequence of London’s rampant urban densification was that waste became intolerably ubiquitous over the course of the nineteenth century. The combination of poorly maintained private cesspools, the city’s haphazard, flood-prone sewers, and a rapidly increasing population all led to a threat to public health as well as a growing frustration across social classes. In *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), Henry Mayhew bemoans the

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, waste was a variable term and inconsistent in its usage. The *OED* suggests that “waste” in this context applied primarily to water waste without excrement (“waste, n. 12c”). However, the *OED* cites *The New Sydenham Society’s Lexicon* (1882), which uses the term “waste matter” specifically in order to define fecal matter (“excrement,” 309).



tendency to deposit human waste into the Thames, first, because of the loss of potential manure that may be “loathsome to man, but demanded by vegetation,” and, second, because the river served as the city’s primary source of potable water and all of central London was ingesting water “impregnated over and over again with our own animal offal” (386). Mayhew describes here two dysfunctional relations between waste and food—waste as agricultural fertilizer, and waste as contaminant and carrier of disease. For Mayhew, Victorian Londoners were foolishly disrupting a productive relation to waste as fertilizer in exchange for one that allowed filth to mingle with food and drink, as well as to spread disease (by miasma, if not yet by what would turn out to be bacteria).<sup>3</sup> Mayhew’s indignant passage recognizes implicitly a shift from one set of waste relations to another—from one that was productive of food to another in which food deteriorates into a deadly agent of disease. This crisis of urban sanitation worsened over the first half of the nineteenth century, giving rise to several deadly cholera outbreaks. It culminated in the summer of 1858, during which the toxic smell of raw sewage deposited into the Thames was exacerbated by unusually hot summer weather. According to Lee Jackson, the Parliament building was particularly engulfed by this smell during the Great Stink in “a kind of poetic justice” after having so long delayed approval for a new sewer system (97). The spirit of rebellion that Jackson playfully ascribes to the river waste is entirely appropriate to the disruptive character of waste more generally. Not to be contained or conveniently carried out of sight by the river, an unprecedented quantity of sewage intruded upon the senses and asserted its material presence with a force worthy of the name “the Great Stink.”

Victorians’ horror of human waste worsened when that waste proved too unmanageable for the engineering, medical, and bureaucratic systems then available. Major proponents of sanitation reform, including Edwin Chadwick and Mayhew, enthusiastically took to the challenge of systematizing unruly urban waste throughout the 1840s and 1850s, but with imperfect results. The Great Stink motivated a series of sanitary reforms throughout the

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<sup>3</sup> In the introduction to *Cleansing the City*, Allen notes that Victorians recognized (if to a limited extent) the link between sewage and fatal diseases like cholera and typhoid. Three major cholera outbreaks in London took place during 1848–49, 1853–54, and 1866–67 (Allen 10), the first of which Mayhew would have been aware by the time he wrote *London Labour and the London Poor*.

1860s, including Joseph W. Bazalgette's plans for a metropolitan sewage network in 1865 and for the Thames Embankment in 1870. According to Efraim Sicher, the discourses surrounding Chadwick's campaign and the 1848 Public Health Act couched sanitation reform within a utopic vision of the technological modernization of Victorian London. Sicher argues that the waste management systems, technologies, and policies that emerged in the 1860s were as much ideological as practical renovations, central to beautifying and visually emphasizing the modernity of the mid-Victorian city ("Bleak Homes and Symbolic Houses"). The elaborate wrought iron embellishments of the Crossness Pumping Station embody this intersection of the technologically innovative and the lavishly decorative (see fig. 1). In essence, waste incited systematization and offered an opportunity to vaunt the British Empire's feats of engineering.



**Figure 1: Photograph © Peter Scrimshaw 2012, taken of the Crossness Pumping Station, which was restored in 1987 and has since been maintained as a museum by the Crossness Engines Trust. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.**

In spite of these early efforts to systematize waste disposal, however, sewage waste still proved unmanageable. As Jackson observes, Bazalgette's sewage network offered only a

temporary and topographically limited solution: “[t]he newer sewer system removed filth and stink from central London, only to shift it upstream<sup>[4]</sup> to Beckton and Crossness. When sewage was discharged, twice a day, the river seemed to revolt against the imposition, ‘hissing like soda-water with baneful gases, so black that the water is stained for miles, and discharging a corrupt charnel-house odour’” (5).<sup>5</sup> Combined with Victorians’ limited knowledge of disease contagion, sewage waste persistently exceeded the systems of policy and engineering that were designed to contain it. On the one hand, then, waste management systems were expressions of Victorian ideologies of sanitation and urban modernity. On the other hand, living with waste was unbearable because of its intrusive, disorderly materiality.

Victorian sewage waste was disruptive in its associative potential, as well as in its physical accumulation. Allen argues that the massive amounts of sewage intruding upon Victorian Londoners’ daily lives was a medical, moral, and social problem as far as the bourgeoisie were concerned: “the problem of filth was at once a physical danger . . . a demoralizing influence, and a social threat; moreover, it was inextricably tied to perceptions and anxieties about the urban poor, who were themselves insufficiently contained” (9). Unmanageable urban waste freely transgressed distinctions of topography and of social classification. Waste systems attempting to address this “challenge of excremental accumulation” (11), as Allen calls the Victorian sewage problem, were made more urgent by this spatial and social unruliness. Excrement was necessary to fertilize soil, as Mayhew points out, but it also fouled the drinking water of the most expensive and desirable neighbourhoods in London.<sup>6</sup> Even Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were not exempt from its intrusive presence; in the

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<sup>4</sup> Both Beckton and Crossness are technically located downstream from central London. However, because the flow of water reverses during the rising flood tide, they might be considered upstream effectively. The pumping stations held sewage in a reservoir. At the ebb tide, it released this sewage to be carried downstream toward the ocean. Part of the challenge of developing a sewage network for the city, then, involved navigating the volatile tidal activity of the Thames, which could see a difference of up to 7 metres in its water levels.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson quotes a comment reported to *The Times* by “A Pharmaceutical Chemist” (8) and which appeared in the September 6th, 1878 issue.

<sup>6</sup> John Wright, editor of *Hansard*, published a pamphlet in 1827 exposing the Grand Junction Water Company for supplying its aristocratic West End customers with drinking water drawn from a source along the Thames located immediately next to a sewage outfall. As Jackson wryly observes, “[t]he elite of the metropolis were receiving diluted excrement for drinking, cooking and laundering – and paying handsomely for the privilege” (51).

summer of the Great Stink, they were driven back to shore shortly after starting a pleasure cruise on the Thames, unable to bear the smell (Ackroyd, *London Under* 87). For better or for worse, waste transforms its environment, and this transformative power threatened Victorian urban spaces. Beyond waste's transformative capacity, moreover, waste's threat lay in its ubiquity—its pervasive and diffuse influence. While waste ecologies were distinct from social and engineering systems, they nevertheless drew impetus from the structures that sought to contain them. Class structure and urban planning, human disgust and medical intervention, all funnelled sewage into the river, ironically expanding its reach as an emergent and threatening ecology.

Alongside these more literal, fecal forms of waste, the action of *wasting* was also an ambivalent concept, denoting both consuming resources to excess and not consuming enough. For instance, the moral imperative of the proverb, “willful waste makes woeful want,” applies to the individual about to discard useful scrap materials as much as to the individual neglecting to save an immediate resource in case of possible want in the future. While iterations of this proverb date back at least to the mid-seventeenth century, this phrase and its variants had a particular currency throughout the nineteenth century, especially in the context of domestic management.<sup>7</sup> In an 1856 article of the *Morning Post*, the writer praises Sir Walter Scott for having the maxim, “Waste not, want not,” inscribed over the kitchen fire of Abbotsford, and exhorts readers to “Let no master, how high soever his social position, or however great his wealth, think that he can, as a Christian, be absolved from enforcing this rule in his household” (4). Yet, Victorians were somewhat skeptical of this simplistic presentation of waste as the antithesis to moral duty. Dickens's novels in particular appear more interested in those characters that waste not and yet continue to want much. The Hexams in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), for instance, struggle to live on what Gaffer Hexam can scavenge from the river. Though they are actively engaged in a practice of recuperating

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<sup>7</sup> The *OED* attributes the earliest published mention of the “willful waste” proverb to an anonymous 1642 tract on the English response to the Irish Rebellion of 1641: “Now if famine punish excesse, if wofull want follow wilfull waste, if others mete the same measure againe into their bosomes, pressed downe and running over, if condemnation mercilesse light on those that shewed not mercy, whom can they condemne?” (*Great Expedition* 11). It is this ambivalent connection to excess and waste, as well as the moral component that emerges in the latter half of the sentence, that concerns my project here.

scavenged waste, they can only maintain the barest subsistence. *Bleak House* (1853) offers a more parodic extreme of this failed maxim in Krook, whose rag-and-bottle shop is a place where “[e]verything seemed to be bought, and nothing to be sold” (67). Krook wastes nothing. He buys and preserves the potential waste that sellers bring into his shop. But in keeping those wares from serving any economic purpose and by allowing them to decay, he also wastes everything. As we shall see in Chapter 2, both the meaningless systematization rendered in the novel’s Court of Chancery and Krook’s rag-and-bottle shop over-systematize that which comes under their purview, mechanically following a mandate of accumulation to the point of producing new waste, whether decaying wares, spontaneously combusted bodies, or ruined and dying legal suitors. Waste, in other words, proves too complex to be managed by the single maxim of “waste not.” Indeed, Krook’s rag-and-bottle shop enacts a literal waste ecology, becoming a topography of waste in which cast-off objects and cast-out characters come to reside and to interrelate over the course of the novel.

The “waste not” maxim had surprisingly versatile uses as a result of waste’s propensity to porously absorb meaning. An unnamed contributor to the November 16, 1867 issue of *Saturday Review* applies the expression—or the “old school lessons about . . . willful waste being the source of woful [sic] want”—to literary composition (627). This contributor, whose article is titled “Literary Waste,” treats literary composition as a kind of scrap work, insisting that writing quality literature depends on authors’ ability “to use up all the material of every sort that ever comes into their hands, and to gather up all the fragments that are left” (627). This writing-by-scavenging method tries to eliminate waste by repurposing it. The minutiae of Dickens’s realism might offer some instances of this advice in practice. Again, however, Victorian authors did not all share in this denial of waste—even so-called literary waste—by repurposing “material of every sort.” In my third chapter, I discuss one Victorian fantasy of such an omnivorous digestion of information. J. S. Sheridan Le Fanu’s “Green Tea” (1872)<sup>8</sup> casts indiscriminate consumption—of knowledge and of food—as an unwholesome engagement. As my chapter will suggest, the character Reverend Jennings devours both

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<sup>8</sup> “Green Tea” was first serialized in *All the Year Round* between October 23rd and November 13th, 1869. It was later published as part of the three-volume collection of Le Fanu’s Martin Hesselius stories, *In A Glass Darkly* (1872).

green tea and ancient pagan texts to excess, with the result that his body transforms into a waste ecology. Contrary to the advice of the *Saturday Review* contributor, these Victorian narratives problematize the unquestioning negation of waste. Where Dickens's realism fulfills to an extent the wisdom of avoiding "literary waste" with its extensive descriptions and catalogues of minutiae, Le Fanu's short story is more circumspect regarding the exhaustive digestion and production of literature.

At the same time that waste was cast as an antagonist to human systems and order, an alternative view was gaining traction among nineteenth-century natural philosophers that held waste as the foundation of human subsistence. Charles Darwin's *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms with Observations on their Habits* (1881) binds the highest forms of human culture and artifice to the material, the contingent, and the seemingly insignificant. In this work, Darwin expresses his fascination with the numbers, power, intelligence, and global impact of earthworms. Worms not only are "extraordinarily numerous, and for their size possess great muscular power," but the feats they accomplish appear astonishingly out of proportion to their size and range of mobility (305). Worms have the power both to preserve and to destroy ancient buildings and ruins; they protect archaeological ruins by covering them with their castings, as well as being capable of literally undermining buildings with shallow foundations. They demonstrate intelligence in strategically covering the openings to their burrows by drawing stray leaves and dirt behind them. Worms are also immensely productive, annually swallowing and excreting several tons of dirt; Darwin applauds their wondrous industry when he points to the "marvellous reflection that the whole of the superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will again pass, every few years through the bodies of worms" (313). Most importantly, however, worms' relentless aeration of soil enables the growth and flourishing of the plant ecologies on which humans rely for survival. Worms, which Victorian natural philosophers had classified as uncomplicated organisms or "lowly organised creatures" (313), combine through their excretory processes animal decay, vegetable decay, minerals, and air, "mingl[ing] the whole intimately together, like a gardener who prepares fine soil for his choicest plants" (309-310). Darwin figures worms as the agricultural predecessors to humans, especially as he writes that "[t]he plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before he existed the land was in fact regularly

ploughed, and still continues to be thus ploughed by earth-worms” (313). These “lowly organised creatures,” in other words, occupy an all-important role within massive geological ecologies through their interaction with and intermingling of refuse—a role that has been overlooked and should be recognized by humans.

Donald Ulin was the first to forward this idea that Darwin’s late work imbues organic waste (worms, soil, and excrement) with a vitality that secures the growth and flourishing of more complex organisms and cultures (humans, art, and beauty):

the main value of worms, according to any farmer or gardener, lies in the way they aerate, sift, and enrich the soil . . . The message is clear: ‘a vast number of worms live unseen by us beneath our feet’, where they carry on a full complement of cultural activities, largely through the agency of their excrement. And furthermore, they have a longer lineage than even the most eminent English families. (304-305)

Ulin traces a subversive undercurrent to Darwin’s cultural criticism that situates waste at the centre of all organic life and culture. This subversion appears briefly in earlier works including *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). It is most visible, however, in *The Formation of Vegetable Mould*, which rhetorically links high culture—i.e., aesthetics, taste, social behaviour—to the material conditions in which that culture appears. For Ulin, Darwin’s meticulous and even reverential attention to worm behaviour and worm castings effectively enacts Bakhtin’s carnivalesque. Worms are not simply unsophisticated organisms—that “live unseen by us beneath our feet”—within a hierarchy of organisms evolving continuously toward complexity. Rather, Darwin dwells upon the importance of worm castings to sites and objects of aesthetic value, from archeological ruins and artefacts to the smooth beauty of a meadow or lawn, drawing a grotesque connection between high aesthetic culture and abject material excrement. The waste of these worms forms the basis of life for other, more complex organisms. Stranger still, the mobility that worms gain through their digestive and excretory processes allows them access to a unique material existence—one involving ancient ruins and archaeological treasures. Excrement is not simply the abject; it is a source of agency, culture, and even beauty. Ulin thus reads Darwin’s worms as collapsing the Arnoldian nature-culture divide—as challenging the Victorian distinction between intellectual, aesthetic, and social cultures, on the one hand, and physical, biological, and material cultures, on the other, all “through the agency of their excrement.” Though

Ulin's focus on the Bakhtinian carnivalesque differs from that of this dissertation, we can find in his argument, however indirectly, the suggestion that worm excrement provides a means by which human ruins can be preserved through integration into a waste ecology. This notion of reintegrating waste back into a productive, non-anthropocentric ecology is the driving logic behind William Robinson's horticultural aesthetic. As we will see in my fourth chapter, where I discuss Robinson's horticultural writings in more detail, Robinson looks to waste ecologies as sites of renewal and vitality in a manner that recalls the agency afforded by Darwin's worm castings.

Darwin's fascination with the ecological impacts of worm waste falls within a larger tendency in Victorian scientific discourses to associate waste with redistributions of energy. Waste, for instance, was a significant term within Victorian thermodynamics and referred to the excess heat generated by the process of harnessing some form of energy. Victorian natural philosophers defined "waste" in opposition to "work"—a binary that M. Norton Wise and Crosbie Smith link to the developing understanding of thermodynamics in the nineteenth century. Where "work" referred to the output of productive, usable energy, "waste" was the dissipation of that energy or its transformation into unproductive, useless energy. Wise and Smith base these definitions of "work" and "waste" on Victorian natural philosopher William Thomson's uses of the terms: "'[w]ork' to him was not an abstract concept, nor merely the capacity of an engine; it was a motivation, a goal of action, the source of value and progress in the modern world, both material and moral. 'Waste' was its opposite, the source of decadence and decline" (265). Waste's complex history of undermining systems, in other words, includes its use in the history of physics as a force of counter-productivity or of entropy, as Allen MacDuffie has shown. MacDuffie expands upon Wise and Smith's connection of waste and entropy, noting that, before the term "entropy" was popularized in Britain during the early twentieth century, Victorians used descriptive approximations of the process of energy dispersal such as "waste heat," "dissipated energy," and "lost energy" ("Victorian Thermodynamics" 211).<sup>9</sup> The concept of a continuous and unchangeable waste

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<sup>9</sup> Though entropy would by the twentieth century accrue its parallel meaning of informational chaos and "the tendency of any system to grow randomized and disorganized," MacDuffie is clear that Victorians understood entropy solely as the dissipation of energy ("Victorian Thermodynamics" 212). Indeed, MacDuffie maintains



of energy “led to extrapolated visions of a down-running cosmos” (“Victorian Thermodynamics” 211). Balfour Stewart sums up this view in his 1873 treatise, *Conservation of Energy*, when he remarks that “[u]niversally diffused heat forms what we may call the great waste-heap of the universe” (153). Waste was at the centre of a pessimistic discourse of inexorable dissolution, death, and the feeble insignificance of humanity. Nor were these discourses exclusive to scientific publications. The impending loss implied by “waste heat” is immortalized by Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, in which the speaker’s sorrow takes the shape of the heat death of the universe: “From out waste places comes a cry, / And murmurs from the dying sun” (III.3-4). In a 2002 issue of *PMLA*, Barri J. Gold reads these “waste places” and the “dying sun” as references to thermodynamics. “[H]eat in technical parlance,” Gold suggests, “as often evokes the heat sink, ‘waste places’ that form the repositories of energy that is past its usefulness” (452). In both Victorian literature and natural philosophy, waste was discursively linked with loss and death on both local and cosmic scales.<sup>10</sup>

Wise and Smith’s account of the Victorian work-waste binary created an important opening for humanities scholarship to integrate key shifts in the history of scientific nomenclature, as MacDuffie argues. In adapting Wise and Smith’s binary to cultural and literary analyses, however, one risks simplifying Victorians’ shifting and indecisive orientations toward waste. For instance, Victorians’ view of waste-heat was contingent on dilations of scale. From a cosmic perspective, waste-heat signified the inexorable end of the universe. From a localized

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that to apply the informational analogy of entropy to Victorian texts risks an anachronism at the expense of Victorian discourses of energy, resource depletion, and waste.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that all of these historical definitions of waste are anthropocentric, *even* entropy, which technically stands opposed to all of the ecologies that I discuss here, but is unerringly imagined in its anthropocentric ramifications, such as how Tennyson discusses it. Tennyson’s metaphor of the “dying sun,” for instance, casts waste-heat as a permanent loss. This invocation of entropy, in other words, assumes that entropy involves the negation or the disappearance of heat. Entropy, however, is only a loss as far as human interests and needs for energy are concerned; entropy involves a conversion or transformation of energy that results in energy that is unusable by and unproductive for humans. The difference between imagining waste-heat as absence and waste-heat as transformative is the difference of an anthropocentric and teleological thinking that does not fully acknowledge the complexity of thermal energy, on one hand, and an ecological thinking that recognizes structures of energy beyond anthropocentric interests, on the other.

perspective, waste-heat was a problem of productivity that could be remedied to some degree and even recuperated. Robert Stirling's hot-air engine and Edward Green's economizer, for instance, were both attempts to reintegrate waste-heat into a system of work. Victorians may have viewed counter-productivity and waste-heat with disgust and even horror, but not necessarily with pessimism. They sought methods to recuperate that loss of productive energy. A shift in perspectival scale offered alternative engagements with entropic waste—one that could serve rather than overwhelm anthropocentric interests—and innovators like Stirling and Green were quick to seize upon these opportunities. Even Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, as Gold argues, begins with a despairing emphasis on the second law of thermodynamics and yet ends with a hopeful recognition that the dissipated waste-heat of the sun is nonetheless the cause of life. And Darwin, as we have seen, more openly celebrates the paradox that the waste of the lowest class of organisms is vital to botanical and animal ecologies alike. Victorians' ambivalent responses to the implications of thermodynamics allow us to realize that waste at once stood for a troubling form of counter-productivity, feats of technological innovation, and organic vitality.

Solar energy is the ultimate example of the ambiguities presented by Victorian waste-heat. Late-nineteenth-century authors used their fiction to imagine ways in which the death of the sun could redefine the Earth's ecologies—a positioning of the present and the future of the Earth in a cosmic waste ecology. The time traveller of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) witnesses the final stages of the dying sun—"red and very large, halted motionless upon the horizon, a vast dome glowing with a dull heat" (194)—in a nightmarish vision of the logical conclusion of the second law of thermodynamics and the eventual depletion of the life-giving waste-heat of the sun. For Victorians, solar energy, the source of all organic life, was simply another form of waste. By implication, then, the Earth's biosphere springs from a larger, cosmic waste ecology. According to Kate Neilsen, Victorians had a tendency to conflate natural and industrial sources of pollution, as well as to cast solar energy as "industrial contaminants" (6). In an attempt to describe Angelo Secchi's and Warren de la Rue's documentation of solar prominences during the June 1860 solar eclipse, Richard A. Proctor reported in 1871 that some of these prominences "resemble[d] smoke from chimneys or from the craters of volcanoes" (263). Proctor's comparison of solar energy to industrial pollutants is telling; the vital sunlight on which they relied was waste heat—a chemical

product of excess energy. As with so many forms of waste, Victorians were caught between an anxious desire to curb this inefficient excess of heat and an awareness that human existence depended on entropic waste-heat.

In the four Victorian understandings of waste above, waste moves nimbly in association from abject toxins, to moral imperative, to vital matter, to entropic excess. These diverse and fluctuating Victorian associations reflect our current critical struggles to find consensus in conceptualizing waste. The absence of a perfectly coherent, totalizing definition of waste, however, can be turned to analytical advantage. The complexity of wastes brought together in a diverse set of interdependent relations is best represented by ecologies—that is, ecologies in Timothy Morton’s sense of structural interrelations rather than in its ties to a given ideology of nature. Morton describes his ecological thinking as a consideration of “‘mesh’. . . the holes in a network and threading between them” (*Ecological Thought* 28). This form of ecocriticism is defined, often, more by its focus on interconnection and relation than by a specifically green critique. Morton’s thinking, for his part, attempts to describe “a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center or edge” (*Ecological Thought* 8). These complex denotations and connotations of waste reveal the extent to which waste resists systems—whether systems of waste disposal or our own systems of knowing. My project therefore imagines a method for examining the structural relations of waste in which human agency and human systematization recede. In doing so, I use the term “ecologies” much in the spirit of Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature*; that is, I consider ecologies as a set of structural characteristics that are not restricted to biological life and ecosystems. Morton’s work continues to play a significant role in what is now a generally accepted practice of using the term ecologies to refer to a variety of social and material systems not typically associated with nature—a dissociation that Morton actively cultivates and encourages in *Ecology Without Nature*.<sup>11</sup> Like Morton’s work, this dissertation

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<sup>11</sup> In this work, Morton interrogates the concept of nature, which he suggests is a cultural artefact that potentially limits a fuller development of ecological thinking. He further considers “ecology” to refer to an infinity of sociobiological systems that may or may not encompass what was hitherto understood as “nature.” Morton also offers a close reading method for literary ecocriticism that he calls “ambient poetics” or “a materialist way of reading texts with a view to how they encode the literal space of their inscription—if there is such a thing—the spaces between the words, the margins of the page, the physical and social environment of the reader” (*Ecology Without Nature* 3).

approaches ecologies as integrated, complex systems that freely incorporate and interrelate living and non-living things.

Waste ecologies are a subset of this dynamic definition of ecological structures and forms—one that embraces the rich tensions that manifest between waste and ecologies. In opting for “ecology,” as opposed to “systems,” this dissertation highlights the transformative and disruptive potential of masses of waste. Systems imply a certain order based on functionality or some form of underlying authority; an ecology, however, makes room for interrelations that shift, with nodes subtly influencing other nodes, outside of any established hierarchy or utility. This dissertation finds its waste ecologies across Victorian literature, from the canonical realist novel, to the Irish Imperial Gothic ghost story, and to practical prose works on garden designs and amateur horticulture. Specifically, I discuss two of Dickens’s novels, *Our Mutual Friend* and *Bleak House*, alongside Le Fanu’s “Green Tea” and a selection of Robinson’s horticultural prose and journalism that appeared between 1869 and 1892. My chapters can be grouped conceptually into two halves: the first dealing with Dickens’s representation of social structures that function as large and small waste ecologies; the second, with the individual interactions with waste ecologies that in Le Fanu’s and Robinson’s works manifest as both occult and apocalyptic. Organized in this way, my project relies upon shifting scales of thought; it moves from broad ecosystems of matter that influence all of Victorian London down to the individual British subject, tea-drinker, or plant.

This dissertation imagines waste ecologies as a density of material relations that are continuously interrelating and growing through the agency enabled by disruptive, transformative waste. For Dickens, Le Fanu, and Robinson, waste ecologies emerge as a site of social, corporeal, and botanical interrelation. In *Our Mutual Friend*, for instance, Gaffer Hexam and Roger Riderhood scavenge river pollution and drowned bodies within a waste ecology of the Thames, attempting by honest and by criminal means, respectively, to reinstate such wastes back into human systems of value. Le Fanu explores a human subject’s horrific, bodily encounters with a waste ecology that compromises both body and mind. Finally, Robinson integrates waste into a botanical ecology that eventually exceeds human designs and interests. My focus allows for broad definitions of trash, refuse, and filth because I read waste as that which grows in the cracks of Victorian systems. Waste ecologies become defined as much by their interconnectedness and transformative tendencies as by their

inclusion of waste, per se. This project therefore posits a distinction between the specific substances or forces that we designate as waste and the organizing (or disorganizing) principles behind that waste. And as the opening example of the waste environment that is Victorian London suggests, we are already familiar with representations of waste ecologies—environs of waste that involve and shape their habitants—though we are not in the habit of naming them as such. My subsequent chapters explore the sites of radical material interrelations that emerge when we look past waste products as discrete material items and reorient ourselves to the complex associations surrounding that waste. For instance, waste ecologies have less to do with sewage itself than with crisscrossing sewage lines, industrious sewer-hunters, and the bio-hazardous drinking waters of aristocratic neighborhoods. Waste ecologies refer to the material complexity of smog, which, without regard for topographical or social boundaries, can comprise many substances, can disperse dust, soot, and ashes, and is absorbed relentlessly by porous human tissue.

In examining waste ecologies in mid- to late-Victorian fiction and prose, this dissertation makes no claims to developing an archaeology of waste in the nineteenth century. The disruptive potential of waste—its polysemic wildness—makes it an attractive analytical subject for both Victorian literary studies and recent theoretical movements like the new materialisms and ecocriticism. Morrison notes that the canon of Western literature is a rich site of analysis for “a ‘waste-oriented’ material ecocritical perspective” (*Literature of Waste*, 3). Reading literary wastes, Morrison claims:

... can help us to understand how we theorize, manage, and are implicated in waste. Literature reflects the ways in which humans commonly perceive waste, yet can also offer complexly textured models for individual and communal behavior and relationships with the world around us. Not always negatively charged, waste contains the potential to *charge*, catalyzing ethical behavior and profound insights, even compassion. (*Literature of Waste*, 3)

Morrison rightly supposes that literary representations of waste provide critical analyses of our broader cultural relationships to waste with “complexly textured models.” This comment on the analytical value of waste-literature, moreover, can be developed further. The literature of waste lends itself to criticism by foregrounding cultural orientations to certain types of waste—and it does so precisely because waste-literature does not document perfectly the physical construction of that waste. Waste-literature is therefore less valuable as a dataset

delineating the exact types of and properties of waste that existed in the nineteenth century than it is as the cultural orientations and perceived relationships surrounding that waste. My project takes cues from Morrison's work. I similarly use a material ecocritical methodology and I am also concerned with depictions of waste. This project, however, is founded upon a form of variety distinct from that which concerns Morrison. If to invoke waste is to invoke a definitional variety, Morrison examines waste as a discrete material category across the entire Western canon. My project, by contrast, focuses on a highly specific period in order to examine the variety of potentials, influences, relations, and reactions that emanate from waste *in situ*.

While many critics view waste as a site of resistance to anthropocentric systems of control, others find in it a confirmation of that control. David Trotter, for instance, claims that "[w]aste is the measure of an organism's ability to renew itself by excluding whatever it does not require for its own immediate purposes. . . . It testifies, in its very dereliction, to the power which cast it down and out" (20). For Trotter, waste has always the potential to be recycled or repurposed and therefore reintegrated into the systems from which it came. While Trotter's observation of the anthropocentrism fundamental to the term "waste" is well worth noting, the chapters that follow and the texts they consider resist his suggestion that waste "gleams with efficiency" (20). Indeed, the very existence of waste suggests a miscalculation in consumption or production, an inefficiency in a system that could not avoid producing some form of excess. Further complicating critical approaches to waste are instances like Ulin's analysis, which implies a radical, post-evolutionary waste that challenges the view that humans have always repudiated waste out of hand. Academic discourses of waste over the past twenty years, in other words, are as various and ambivalent as those of the nineteenth century. Even Morrison has recently acknowledged the contradictions inherent in any attempts to describe waste, which is a dynamic agent couched in both the material and the figurative: "[w]aste necessarily implicates history, and implies materiality, metaphor, and emotional affect. . . . Without the material that is discarded, we cannot enter the realm of the metaphoric, of literature, and of the imagination. Waste is literal *and* literary" (8). It is that same categorical fluidity of waste that Boscagli emphasizes while observing that: "[g]arbage, a full affront to ordered materiality, is stuff at its most uncertain, vulnerable, and wild" (227). Just as waste matter continually threatens to burst out of its containers and sully, disarrange,

or damage our systems of organization, the concept of waste spills out of our semantic systems across our carefully arranged conventions, distinctions, and terminology.

Though waste ecologies are not relevant to the nineteenth century alone, they are particularly worth analyzing in this context because of Victorians' persistent preoccupation with and investment in systems. Waste encompasses that which has no place within, and which gets actively expelled from, systems, making it the ideal site for imagining profuse interrelations free of order or systematization. The nineteenth century saw massive and coordinated efforts toward systemization, from the slum clearances that preceded the Thames Embankment to the forms, rituals, and microscopic documentation of its legal administration. Chadwick's sanitarian movement, Victorians' profound distrust of contaminated imperial trade products, and the geometric horticultural arrangements of the gardenesque all privileged hierarchical organization. Victorians wanted to identify with, and be identified by, systems. Confronted with waste, however—confronted with unsystematizable profusion—Victorians' relationship to systems became ambivalent. In Dickens's *Bleak House*, Gridley's compulsive repetition of "the system" (251) levels a reproach to those systems that supersede, organize, and effectively make waste of the individual. What was so troublesome about waste was that it revealed the fault lines of Victorians' carefully crafted systems. Waste revealed systems as ecological in structure, and these disorienting structural conditions forced Victorians to recognize the limitations of systematic organization more broadly.

This undesirable reckoning—this disorienting set of structural conditions enabled by waste—is what I term waste ecologies and is of particular moment to our cultural analyses of the Victorian period. Victorian studies have already begun adopting and adapting ecologies as a conceptual model freed from a specific, natural implication. This year Devin Griffiths and Deanna Kreisel edited a special issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture* on the topic of "Open Ecologies." With its nimble approach to permeable systems and assemblages, this special issue comes closest to describing the chaotic, holistic, and infinite structural growth that I discuss: "open ecology does not resurrect the benign unities of natural theological or organic discourse; rather, it turns to those messy, contested, and often violent histories through which cultural and natural systems continue to produce each other, those conflicted formations Bruno Latour describes as 'nature-cultures'" (6-7). New materialisms, eco-criticism, and Victorian new historicism have cross-pollinated in fruitful and productive

ways—giving rise, for instance, to the Ecologies collective, which highlights the rich methodologies that the environmental humanities can offer Victorian literary studies. Like open ecologies, waste ecologies suggest an overwhelming possibility of coherence, of subsuming new additions into their interrelations. Ecologies, as Morton suggests, also offer a form of structural organization involving radical interrelation as opposed to ordered hierarchies and classifications. Brought together, waste ecologies emerge as the productive interrelations of waste.

Waste is a provokingly fluid, capricious term that encompasses equally elusive sub-categories as dirt, debris, garbage, and decay. Waste's potential for variety suggests its dynamic structure as a concept—one that promises and threatens. As Boscagli observes, there is a latent power to waste's categorical nebulousness: "[g]arbage's fluidity may be seen as a threat to be contained, or as a force synonymous with the fluid enticements of consumerism itself. Garbage is the most characteristic object-hoard of consumer culture, and its outlaw underside. Thus it occupies a dangerous, potentially disruptive position" (228).<sup>12</sup> Whether the discarded products of a twenty-first-century consumer culture, or the open sewage behind the Great Stink, waste opens a space for new ecologies of meaning. As Allen aptly observes, "[f]ilth signified urban disease in its widest sense—a failure of the urban system" (15). Waste not only encompasses interrelations that are aesthetic, cultural, economic, and biohazardous; it also foregrounds those material things that fall out of human systems of classification and order. Waste ecologies upend human classifications, human systems of value, and the centrality of the human subject. The fog in both *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* is unpredictable and uncontainable, creeping unwanted into buildings regardless of social and topographical boundaries, gaining in atmospheric density, and creating a set of conditions that might disguise or blind passersby to all manner of evils. This fog-waste is set apart by its freedom from the usual constraints of solid waste matter like dust and debris; it spreads freely across neighborhoods and districts, permeates indoor and

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<sup>12</sup> Here, Boscagli positions garbage as the necessary other to those still-desirable commodities, which have not yet lost their novelty or perceived value. Although Boscagli is chiefly concerned with waste in the context of twenty-first century consumer culture, her conception of waste as a radical, de-structuring agent has been central to my own approach to wastes and waste ecologies in Victorian literature.



outdoor spaces, and clogs the pores and lungs of the city's inhabitants. Waste ecologies, as a focus for reading, highlights the strange structural conditions through which this occurs.

Waste may be an anthropocentric term—implying excess, or the lack of utility relative to humans. However, by examining how human will and agency recede within waste ecologies, this dissertation embraces waste as an opportunity to challenge that very anthropocentrism. The waste ecologies in my first chapter feature dust, for instance, due to its intrusive, imposing, and insistently present quality. Contrary to the productive potential implicit in systems of energy, ecologies of waste scatter and transform the discarded remnants of production. Waste, moreover, is visible specifically because it denies any possibility of equilibrium; it is an open system, continually accruing more material at a rate too fast for either decomposition or recycling to compete. The *animacy* (to use Chen's term) of these waste ecologies forms the foundation for a complex struggle between humans and material things. Throughout my chapters, waste transgresses the narrow categorical controls that humans have attempted to maintain: product and waste, human agent and inanimate object.

The urbanization of London grew organically and in countless fragmented developments; the sewage system had to accommodate and to adhere to that ecology, which is why it continues to resemble that visual organicism. Chapter 1 examines two literal examples of waste ecologies in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*—the Harmon dust-heaps and the Thames, and the strange material entanglements that surround them. These two massive ecologies of waste—of dust and debris, of sewage and corpses—form the centre of a complex struggle for agency between the living and the nonliving. The human characters of the novel exist at the mercy of one or both of these waste ecologies. Silas Wegg oscillates between an anxiety to keep the bone of his amputated leg out of Venus's miscellaneous wares, and his desire to dig up valuable documents in the Harmon dust-heaps. Gathered into immense quantities that threaten and overwhelm the human characters by turn, these two major waste ecologies image a form of waste that routinely bleeds outward—that is uncontainable, that is uncategorizable, and that has accrued its own potential for agency.

Where the waste ecologies of *Our Mutual Friend* involve more direct examples of waste and ecologies, Chapter 2 takes up *Bleak House* for its depiction of three social systems that function as waste ecologies: Krook's rag-and-bottle shop, the High Court of Chancery in

Lincoln's Inn, and the crowded London slums called Tom-all-Alone's. The novel presents all three as loci of excessive accumulated material that in their rampant proliferation objectify, devalue, and homogenize everything within. Krook's body is vaporized by spontaneous human combustion and covers everything in the shop with his greasy remains, as if determined to become part of his own wares. The Court of Chancery does not exist for legal adjudication so much as for the relentless, cancerous proliferation of paper, much to the detriment of the legal subjects that the Court is supposed to serve. In the collapsed buildings of Tom-all-Alone's, we witness the categorical collapse of wasted bodies, wasted buildings, and waste water alongside the exponential proliferation of debris, new tenants, crevices-turned-lodgings, insect larvae, plant mould, and viruses. The same logic of material accumulation prevails in all three spaces, devaluing all categories of matter indiscriminately; accumulation decreases—rather than increases—value.

*Bleak House* is rich with possible examples of what Jane Bennett has termed “thing-power” (20). For example, the indecipherable legal copies of the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit gain astonishing power over the novel's human characters. Because these papers are so void of human meaning, and so counter-productive to the judicial system that they are meant to advance, they acquire what seems like a mesmeric influence over suitors like Richard Carstone and the late Tom Jarndyce, with the result that both men are driven to their respective forms of self-destruction. Even more relevant to the waste ecologies of this dissertation is Chen's *Animacies*, which focuses more particularly on the biopolitical power dynamics couched within “the animateness or inanimateness of entities that are considered either ‘live’ or ‘dead’” (10). By teasing apart the political ramifications of bodies represented along varying degrees of physical liveliness and animation, Chen draws attention to the “relationality and intersubjective exchange” that can exist between material entities beyond a simple life-nonlife binary (11). Like Bennett, who considers the affects of inanimate, inhuman material entities, Chen places pressure on biopolitical theory “to consider how matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise ‘wrong’ animates cultural life”—particularly “how the fragile division between animate and inanimate—that is, beyond human and animal—is relentlessly produced and policed and maps important political consequences of that distinction” (2). Both Chapters 1 and 2 focus on “insensate,” “deathly,” and “wrong” matter—like the “spoiling influences” (172) of the Thames, or the

“tainting sort of weather” that turns out to be Krook’s combusted remains (507). The novels’ characters repudiate both “wrong” matter and those who freely engage with such matter; Pleasant Riderhood rejects Venus’s suit because he regards the living and nonliving equally, in the same “bony light” (84).<sup>13</sup>

Chen’s theory in particular not only accounts for the material porousness that appears in both of these Dickens novels; *Animacies* also paves the way for comprehending the complex ecological structures behind the many instances of waste in the two texts. In a passing remark on how readily animacies applies to ecological studies, Chen describes ecologies as “the constant interabsorption of animate and inanimate bodies”—as “the physical nonintegrity of individual bodies and the merging of forms of ‘life’ and ‘nonlife’” (11). Though a strikingly different complex, as we shall see, Dickens’s Court of Chancery is more than an apparatus of state power; it slips beyond the control of its human originators, functioning as a waste ecology that radically reshapes the material relations of the people and things that it enfolds. The culminating point of *Animacies* is that “animacy has the capacity to rewrite conditions of intimacy, engendering different communalisms and revising biopolitical spheres, or, at least, how we might theorize them” (3). This radical reordering applies particularly well to Chapters 3 and 4, which as we shall see imagine strange material intimacies as an occult nightmare, on the one hand, and as a botanical celebration of death on the other.

Dickens was not the only Victorian author to imbue his work with waste’s organic and diffuse relations. The peculiar forms of waste ecologies that I am concerned with in this project appear across disparate genres and forms of Victorian literature. In my first two chapters I begin with two canonical texts; my latter two chapters then open up to texts that offer increasingly complex literary realizations of waste ecologies. Chapter 3 is like Chapters 1 and 2 in its concern with waste ecologies as imaginative constructs that are chaotic, that are intensely connected, and that in their interrelatedness are continuously accruing new materials. Where it departs is in the type of waste ecology at its centre—the indigestible ecologies of Le Fanu’s “Green Tea.” The waste ecology in “Green Tea” begins with Jennings’s excessive consumption of green tea, develops in an irrevocable series of spectral

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<sup>13</sup> In the 1865 first collected edition of *Our Mutual Friend*, “bony” is spelled “boney” (64; 1st ed.).

events involving a monkey demon, and ends with Jennings's suicide. The chapter argues not only that spectres can be read as waste but that, as waste, spectres also form a shifting and creative ecology. Le Fanu's tale engages the indigestible food-waste ecologies involving the contaminated tea panic, the counterfeit tea trade, and the mingled nationalism and Orientalism orbiting a product of imperial trade that was both prized and held in suspicion. The text further complicates this through an indigestible ecology of occult knowledge. Ultimately, "Green Tea" depicts the human body's spectral reaction when it is at the intersection of competing ecologies. These ecologies and resonances coalesce in Jennings's body, which transforms into a crossroads of colonialism and of the occult that only ends with his suicide—a final, desperate attempt to assert some control over these waste ecologies. Jennings's suicide is a bleak if strange example of how human agency in waste ecologies necessarily takes the shape of death. In *Bleak House*, Richard Carstone's release from the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit is timed with the culmination of his final illness, when his mouth is too full of blood to address his outrage to the Court. These vivid scenes, however fictional, remind us that the role of humans in waste ecologies is fulfilled in death. Chapter 4 takes a final shift, then, toward the waste ecologies that get naturalized in the garden, the horticultural designs that promote botanical self-sufficiency, and an aesthetic philosophy that embraces the death of the human in the prose works of Victorian garden designer and horticultural author Robinson.

Robinson was a leading figure in the development and popularization of the English cottage garden aesthetic in the late-nineteenth century. Robinson's horticultural books remain in print today, and, in the subtitle of her 1982 biography of Robinson, Mea Allan refers to him as the "Father of the English Flower Garden." In spite of his charismatic prose style and enduring horticultural influence, Robinson's prose and journalism have received little attention from Victorian literary scholars. I devote the fourth chapter of this dissertation to selections of Robinson's prose that develop his wild garden aesthetic and that offer the most vivid instances of his idiosyncratic discussions of waste ecologies. Robinson's books naturalize biological waste in the garden and offer strategies for circulating and distributing that waste to the benefit of the plant life and to the beauty of the garden landscape. As far as the ecosystems of a given biosphere are concerned, there is no waste in the sense of the valueless, the purposeless, or the unimportant. Only when the garden is given over to

incompatible or competing ecologies does Robinson recognize waste. Robinson considers abandoned sheds and cart-loads of horse manure to represent potential mushroom beds and plant fertilizers, all while decrying horticultural wastefulness in forms as various as excessive lawn-mowing, impractical ceramic tiling, expensive sub-tropical annuals, and geometric lines and mathematic spacing between plants. Robinson's work also expresses waste as the lingering agency of the past. Old building ruins and mouldered walls beautify and acclimatize alpine flowers from distant countries; meadows left un-mown naturalize hardy flowers and recall the poetic beauty of Elizabethan mixed-border gardens; an urn cemetery is the most beautiful flower garden. In short, I argue that Robinson's horticultural aesthetic is a waste ecology—one that defines economic, aesthetic, and ecological wastes upon the premise that aestheticized botanical life is more valuable than an aestheticized human experience.<sup>14</sup> Human labour is a transitory necessity during the garden's early arrangement, and Chapter 4 takes up Robinson's *God's Acre Beautiful* (1880) and follows the logic of his aesthetic to the inevitable conclusion that human life cannot truly join the garden ecology except in death, or as decay. In his plans to use the urn-cemetery as a flower garden, Robinson envisions effectively a way in which human remains cease to be "waste" or to be wasted by joining the garden-cemetery ecology.

Ultimately, this dissertation examines Victorians' engagement with the waste that slips from systems conceived of as controlled, comprehensive, and beautifully ordered, but which, in their realization, revealed themselves to be complex, unruly ecologies. The texts that I explore in these chapters all express a simultaneous longing for and disenchantment with systems—whether social, legal, digestive, colonial, waste disposal, or horticultural—that cannot repress their organicism. Though they arrive at different conclusions, these works consider the structural fault lines of Victorian systems as they are revealed in waste. Texts like *Bleak House* and *God's Acre Beautiful* engage, foreground, and even embrace the waste that has yet to be or resists being incorporated within a variety of Victorian systems. Waste ecologies concern those things that—however much we may deem them waste or wasteful—

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<sup>14</sup> Though the subject matter of Robinson's work includes ecologies in nature, the waste ecologies that I observe in his horticultural designs are still ecologies in Morton's sense—i.e., are not ecologies within nature. Rather, I suggest that Morton's waste ecologies are ecologies of cultivation and redistribution.

become enfolded into and can even reorder complex ecologies. The Thames appears in *Our Mutual Friend* as a massive repository of debris, sewage, and drowned bodies that courses through Victorian London with eco-poetic intensity, organizing and disorganizing material relations in its wake. A similar structural disorganization appears in *Bleak House*'s depiction of the Court of Chancery, which, with its over-structured and overdeveloped administrative branches, thoroughly undermines all purposes other than its own endless growth. Reverend Jennings's own body becomes the site of indigestible ecologies in "Green Tea," which links his physiological and spiritual torment to both his tea-drinking and colonial cosmopolitanism. Finally, Robinson champions a vision of garden design that embraces waste. For Robinson, the ideal wild or cottage garden should promote the self-sufficiency of its plants such that the garden could survive and flourish even after a ten years' absence of the gardener. His horticultural designs anticipate the inevitable de-structuring of gardens for which the only impetus is further growth. The primary texts examined in this dissertation all suggest a profound fascination with and, perhaps, awe of emergent and complex structures over simpler, forced, artificial human structures. Dickens's Thames, dust-heaps, pawn shops, and legal papers are formidable entities. Le Fanu's short story follows the transformation of a scholar's nightmarish immersion within competing indigestible ecologies. Where Robinson's vision of a wild garden ecology is characterized by a complex structure, the two aesthetics against which he defines that vision—the gardenesque and the architectural garden—speak to a tendency toward simplifying and structuring the garden. Taken together, the four chapters of this dissertation suggest that a literary analysis of Victorian waste ecologies is as elusive and as ungovernable as the ecologies themselves.

## Chapter 1

### 1 Heaps and Flows: Agentic Wastes in *Our Mutual Friend*

Debris, refuse, dirt, fog—all manner of waste—are rarely allowed to pass from our attention in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*. Their presence, certainly, is central to the affect of the novel as a whole but they do not appear solely as set-dressing. Rather, the most notable instances of the novel's waste centre on scrupulous and strategic acts of repurposing waste, ones that in turn affect characters' agency and quality of life. At the heart of the plot sit the Harmon dust-heaps, which generate the pernicious wealth that endangers or corrupts its beneficiaries. These dust-heaps are valuable as a trove of potential recyclables—even more so than for the treasures or numerous wills buried therein. Similarly, the Thames's slow progress through the city carries with it a vast bulk of refuse, debris, and abject material. Attending on this recurring tidal flow is a small population dealing in repurposed waste. Fanny Cleaver (or Jenny Wren) buys scrap materials or the “damage and waste of Pubsey and Co.” for her dolls' dressmaking work (717). Others take waste repurposing to an extreme, finding value in corpses fished from the Thames or in amputated limbs purchased in bulk from hospital porters. Whether a background detail or the centre of a character's livelihood, the novel's vast catalogue of urban waste products is gradually revealed to have a fundamental relation to the existence and identities of the novel's population of disparate characters.

Although waste is a result of human manufacture and industry, its presence in *Our Mutual Friend* resists and thwarts anthropocentric control at every turn. Necessarily, waste is matter that falls outside of our general categories and systems of utility. Its problematic build-up, its nuisance existence, then, are not in and of themselves surprising in an 1860s urban novel; rather, waste achieves a currency in the novel precisely in the force of its ability to resist human ambition and in the agency it demonstrates when threatening the identities of those human characters that must interact with its massive presence. Even when waste appears passive, to serve only an atmospheric function, it nonetheless inconveniences and unsettles the city's inhabitants. Fog does not merely obscure or muffle; it penetrates urban structures as a “burglarious stream of fog creeping

in to strangle it [the sobbing gaslight] through the keyhole of the main door” (420). In King’s Cross, giant mounds of dust, formerly owned by the late Harmon Sr. and bequeathed to Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, are consistently sifted and worked over by a team of dustmen. These heaps of debris are the defining feature of the Harmon estate; as Mr. Boffin remarks, the grounds would “look but a poor dead flat without the Mounds” (185). Made up of “[c]oal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough dust, and sifted dust—all manner of Dust” (13), the dust-heaps have substantial financial value because they can be either sifted for recyclables or sold as fertilizer. The Thames, made swampy and treacherous by its cargo of debris, silt, and sewage, is more mercurial, marking less politely the convenient catch-all category of waste or “dust”. Indeed, the Thames is featured as the convenient repository for the unwanted (sewage, waste, and refuse), a hiding spot for the incriminating (George Radfoot’s body, Bradley Headstone’s bargeman disguise), a dangerous trap for the near-dead (John Harmon, Roger Riderhood, Eugene Wrayburn), and a resting place for the dead (Radfoot, Gaffer Hexam, Headstone, Riderhood). In both spaces, the dust heaps and the river, waste retains a certain priority over the landscape and the human characters of the novel in ways that suggest rich ecologies of material relations.

This chapter explores the ways in which *Our Mutual Friend* invests a certain activity, animation, and agency in waste. As massive quantities of waste that threaten and overwhelm the human characters by turn, the Harmon dust-heaps and the Thames form waste ecologies that resist human categories of meaning: both are repositories of waste, and yet they house valuable resources; they inspire both indifference and reverence; they facilitate human endeavour, and yet compromise—sometimes fatally—the same. The Harmon dust-heaps exhibit a limitless capacity to involve, reorient, and incorporate. This “geological formation” of dust provides ample work for dustmen because it demands sifting, classification, and a breaking up of its ecological structure (13). The river is suffused with a particularly menacing animacy. When the search party rows toward Gaffer’s abandoned boat, everything in view seems “to be there with a fell intention” (171). The fell intentions are the river’s threats to recategorize human life, to transform living characters into nonliving corpses. Waste ecologies are ecosystems of interdependent material entities. Humans may contribute material to these waste



ecologies whether domestic, industrial, or bodily, and even adapt to those ecologies by gathering and repurposing what waste materials they can, but the ecologies are the aggregate of so many moving and unmoving materials that they cannot be reduced or subordinated to the concerns of any one participant.

The *animacy* of these waste ecologies forms the foundation for a complex material and biopolitical struggle between humans and material things. Jane Bennett wonders in passing what would happen to us as consumers if we shifted our view of waste from “litter, rubbish, trash, or ‘the recycling’” to “an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter?” (viii). This chapter takes these scholars, not to mention Dickens, at their word. To read the waste of *Our Mutual Friend* for its agentic character is to argue that a deep-seated fear of waste lay at the centre of the mid-Victorian urban experience. Waste appears in *Our Mutual Friend* as animate, agentic,<sup>15</sup> vibrant things. There is an active, lifelike animation, for instance, to the narrator’s description of the sawdust scattered in the streets, which “hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails” (144). Like Bennett’s thing-power, the various and thing-like permutations of waste in Dickens’s novel operate in excess of human meaning, arrangement, or will. Like the object that looks back, inanimate things in this novel are frequently presented as agents on par with human characters. A power struggle emerges between humans and waste—a materialist struggle over the integrity or non-integrity of living and nonliving bodies—in which waste is shown, ultimately, to have the upper hand. Sawdust is “blinding and choking” (144); the “burglarious stream of fog creeping in to strangle [the sobbing gaslight] through the keyhole of the main door” (420). This agency of Dickensian waste resembles Mel Chen’s description of ecologies, which involve “the constant interabsorption of animate and inanimate bodies,” “the physical nonintegrity of

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use the terms “agentic,” “agent,” and “agency” to evoke the notion of animacy debated within linguistics, which Chen traces back to Michael Silverstein’s famous notion of “animacy hierarchies” and describes as “a conceptual order of things, an animate hierarchy of possible acts” (Chen 3).

individual bodies[,] and the merging forms of ‘life’ and ‘nonlife’” (11). In *Our Mutual Friend*, I tease out this “physical nonintegrity” between the human characters and various objects, waste, or nonlife forms in the novel. New and old gentry live the life of leased furniture: Twemlow is “an innocent piece of dinner-furniture that [goes] upon easy castors and [is] kept over a livery stable-yard in Duke Street, Saint James’s, when not in use” (6); the “bran-new” Veneerings live, like their furniture, their plate, and their carriage, “in a state of high varnish and polish. And what was observable in the furniture, was observable in the Veneerings—the surface smelt a little too much of the workshop and was a trifle sticky” (6). Amputated limbs and skeletons assembled from a miscellany of human bones are interchangeable with living human subjects; riverside scavengers are, themselves, scavenged. This movement between animate and inanimate bodies, or tension between living and nonliving forms, describes the power—biological or otherwise—that waste exhibits in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Waste comes to accrue new meaning as we begin to consider the novel as a fictive power struggle between the living and nonliving. Gathered into waste ecologies like the dust-heaps or the Thames, this animacy becomes more apparent. The emerging field of waste studies encompasses methodologies such as mine that combine a new-materialisms-informed attention to complex material relations with the approaches and broader interests of ecocriticism. Gay Hawkins’s *Ethics of Waste* is still influential for its analysis of our culturally mediated material relations to waste and “the mutual constitution of human subjects and inanimate wasted objects” (2-3). In 2008, Patricia Yaeger proposed a theory of “rubbish ecology” that carries forward a conservationist impulse into garbage, and which she defines “as the act of saving and savouring debris” (329). Heather Sullivan’s dirt theory considers the mobile and unmanageable processes of dirt and its entanglements with “small-scale ecological processes that are themselves integrated into larger niches of other assemblages” (516). More recently, Susan Morrison’s *The Literature of Waste* threads together a massive array of material ecocriticism, critical theories of waste, and examples across the entire western literary canon, developing a kind of waste literacy. In threading together these powerful biopolitical discourses, we may come to consider the ways in which *Our Mutual Friend* collapses the foreground-background distinction between humans and waste, emphasizing instead the intimate

material relations of a world that stretches and reorients the animate hierarchy, that imagines Victorian London as a space for inanimate agents and human objects. Dickens's work presents a unique opportunity to reimagine these relations. This chapter takes steps in this direction by discussing Dickens's imagining of urban waste ecologies that trouble the biopolitical boundaries of life over nonlife. In this way, waste ecologies become a means of reimagining the social and anthropocentric systems of Dickens's novels for their materialist and ecocritical significance. From here we will consider what I have been referring to as the two waste ecologies of *Our Mutual Friend*, with an eye to weighing the waste-human power dynamic latent in each.

## 1.1

Dickens characterizes Victorian London as a city with two distinct halves—one animate and the other inanimate:

It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither.  
(420)

Arranged in a subject-object binary relation, these two halves of the city sit in uneasy relation with a clear imbalance of power between them. “Animate London” refers to the human subjects of the city “blinking, wheezing, and choking” in the city smog, while “inanimate London” encompasses the objects, or the goods, architecture, and landscape of the city. Animate London has fallen ill in this “heavy and dark” climate, and can neither see, smell, nor breathe properly; as a representation of subjecthood, animate London's only exercise of its privileges is to be weary, weather-beaten, and physically ill.

The very animation of Animate London appears reduced, its capacity and agency minimized to exhausted reaction.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, Inanimate London steals into the eyes and lungs, infecting and elusive. Inanimate London, “a sooty spectre,” haunts the animate like an abject, unknowable, and yet omnipresent twin whose *thing*-like intractability provokes the city’s actions and reactions. Inanimate London remains indistinct, seeming to refer to the streets, buildings, material of the city, and above all to their common characteristic – a spectral dirtiness. This filth, this dust, is the aggregate mass of interrelated waste matter spread throughout the city, inconveniencing and disrupting Animate London. Inanimate London stands as an ecology of waste in the novel, developing animacy through overwhelming amounts of circulating matter, which, having hit a critical mass, far exceeds the control and comprehension of the city’s population. Overwhelming in spatial and temporal scale, waste ecologies reorient and restructure the living and nonliving entities that come into contact with them.

The image of the two Londons, distinct and yet mutually constitutive, is a distilled metaphor for the ambiguous relationship between human and nonhuman entities—a relationship explored at some length in the branch of criticism that Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann call material ecocriticism, and which includes Timothy Morton’s hyperobjects. The ecologies of waste in *Our Mutual Friend* similarly rest on the foundational premise that humans are part of but by no means dominant in a broader ecology of material entities, living and nonliving. By adapting material ecocritical methodologies to Victorian representations of waste, we can begin to generate more complex interpretations of the material relations latent in nineteenth-century literature.

Critics often read the waste in *Our Mutual Friend* by focusing on the economic impact of Victorian practices of recycling, and for good reason. Catherine Gallagher makes a

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Schwenger observes a fascinating paradox in Merleau-Ponty’s argument that a subject is defined by its sensory abilities, suggesting that “the things of this world are ultimately distant from us” and so the subject’s reliance on those abilities in fact disqualifies it from subjecthood (*Tears of Things*, p. 3).

thorough case, for instance, for reading the novel as a bioeconomic system centred on the commodification of its characters. Brian Maidment, in his monograph on the historical and cultural development of dustmen, points to the journalism of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* as evidence of Victorians' fascination with recycling. According to Maidment, the journalism of both magazines reflected a "sustained interest in the reclamation and transformation of waste, as well as in the precise scientific description and analysis of dust . . . entirely characteristic of the mid-Victorian period" (185–86). Part of this sustained interest was the way in which Victorian social reformers linked recycling to an ideal of the city as a utopia of modern efficiency and sanitation.

Cleanliness was not only a signifier of modernity, and of freedom from disease, but it also became a form of social capital—a distinction from working classes who were still required to repurpose and consequently work closely with human waste. A number of critics link Dickens's known interest in urban sanitation, as well as his depictions of urban squalor, to Mayhew, who detailed the living conditions of the working classes and the poor most notably in *London Labour*, was particularly invested in recycling as crucial to his vision of a modern, efficient London. Sicher cautions against an unqualified collapse of the two authors' approach to waste and sanitation, observing that "Mayhew had an ethnographic, as well as commercial, interest in showing the usefulness of London's 'wild tribes,' its street and river people, while Dickens was concerned with a larger discourse about the decay of the city, which hinged on the literal as well as metaphorical recycling of waste" ("Reanimation" 38). Sabine Schülting's view of the utilitarian thrust to Mayhew's economy of recycling supports Sicher's call for a greater distinction between Mayhew's and Dickens's relation to waste. For Schülting, Mayhew's ideal city is one purged of waste: "On the streets or in the river, refuse, excrement, and dust are 'matter in the wrong place' and, thus . . . synonymous with loss and waste, as it is opposed to a providential economy of nature that is circular" (25). Where Mayhew treats waste as abject and seeks instead what Schülting calls a "(textual) purification of London" (25), Dickens's prose bears a more complex orientation to waste. For Sicher, Dickensian waste offers the possibility of rejuvenation, even redemption. Sicher argues that this possibility manifests in *Our Mutual Friend* as a parallel renewal—the literal

renewal that is the recycled dust-heaps, to the corresponding spiritual renewal in characters like Bella Wilfer and Eugene Wrayburn.

The academic focus on literary practices of recycling is unsurprising considering its historical and cultural significance throughout the Victorian period. Victorian texts, as well as our cultural and academic memory of the period, frequently highlight momentous sanitary reforms such as the embankment of the Thames, the London clearance schemes and forced migration of the poor, and the clean water and sewage advocacy spearheaded by Edwin Chadwick. In continuing to read strictly for recycling, however, we risk oversimplifying the complexity of Victorians' relationship with waste. Firstly, the Victorian sanitary reforms were far from being universally welcome; Michelle Allen urges us to consider the diverse responses among the Victorian middle-classes to the impacts of such reforms, and to question scholars' "widely held belief in the unquestioned efficacy and desirability of sanitary reforms" (7). Indeed, Allen implicitly highlights the Victorian logic that paralleled the urban poor and waste, noting that the central London clearances beginning in the 1840s were largely seen as acts of Mayhewesque purification—rhetoric that conflates the unemployed with the unrecyclable.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, recycling is a fundamentally anthropocentric practice; it describes a cycle in which materials are reintegrated into a capitalist system of exchange in order to profit those selling a product either that is already produced or that requires little to no production cost. By Mayhew's logic, "matter" only becomes "waste" when it moves beyond the strict parameters of a closed circuit of recycling—when it no longer serves an anthropocentric function by benefitting human economic systems. The demands of

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<sup>17</sup> Allen, describing four articles in *All the Year Round* on the demolition of poor neighbourhoods in London that were justified on grounds of sanitation and the need for railway construction, writes: "Clearances of this sort had convulsed central London since the 1840s and were closely associated with sanitary reform because they destroyed and thus 'purified' some of the most densely built, most densely populated, and dirtiest areas of the city" (3). Allen further sums up the contentious notion that the sewage system was for Victorians: "for some, the sewer seemed to jeopardize individual and local autonomy because it took waste removal out of the hands of householders and parishes and invested it in a newly consolidated drainage authority; for others, the sewer posed a threat to the ideals of domestic privacy and enclosure because it connected the home to a vast drainage system; and for others still, the sewer seemed to weaken the spatial and social barriers separating the healthy bourgeoisie from a corrupt working class" (25).

ecocriticism urge contemporary scholars beyond the anthropocentric limits of recycling, which risks obscuring the nuance of texts like *Our Mutual Friend* that are surprisingly ambivalent regarding the exact relations of humans and waste. We miss the full strangeness of waste in certain Victorian texts, in other words, in our reuse of recycling as a critical methodology.

## 1.2

When Mortimer Lightwood first introduces the dust-heaps that sit at the centre of *Our Mutual Friend*, he presents their scale as a tectonic shift of the landscape. Lightwood describes the late owner, Mr. Harmon Sr., who “‘lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough dust, and sifted dust—all manner of Dust’” (13). Even at this early stage, Lightwood’s language casts the Harmon dust-heaps as an ecosystem—a mountain range with its own unique and interdependent climate and inhabitants. The repeated images of monumental terrain—“mountain range,” “old volcano,” “geological formation”—moreover suggests that this ecosystem operates outside the anthropocentric scale, on geological time. Lightwood’s catalogue of the materials that comprise the dust-heaps covers the gamut of mineral, vegetable, and animal—“Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust”—and the association of these varied forms under the term “Dust” gives an early indication of waste’s capacity to involve and incorporate.

There are contradictory forces encapsulated in the various forms of dust in *Our Mutual Friend*. Victorian dust inhabited a unique position both as the untidy debris of urban living and as a recyclable (and potentially profitable) resource. As Brian Maidment observes, Dickens oversaw many journalistic pieces in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* that reflected this paradoxical character of dust. Dust profits us and imposes upon us, sometimes even “blinding [us] and choking [us]” (144). Dust carves out its own spaces in an already dense cityscape, and yet the repurposing of dust by humans is a central conceit of the novel, posing a dilemma to the Victorian social systems that would have dust occupying conflicting categories of value. Maidment sums up the baffling

nature of this dilemma when he observes that Mr Boffin “remains the single most powerfully imagined exposition of the complex interdependence between dust, wealth, happiness, contamination, and redemption” (10).

The difficulty in reconciling these competing categorizations comes of dust operating on the level of things, of vital quasi-agents. The persistent, intrusiveness of dust, coupled with its elusive generality, recalls Bill Brown’s remark in his seminal essay, “Thing Theory,” on the strange incomprehensibility of things: “On the one hand, then, the thing baldly encountered. On the other, some thing not quite apprehended” (5). As with things, dust asserts its presence suddenly and inconveniently, while, as a category, dust also encompasses such a variable range of materials that it may constitute everything or nothing and remains “some thing not quite apprehended.”<sup>18</sup> Jane Bennett furthers this approach in *Vibrant Matter*, in which she argues for the agentive vitality of nonliving and inorganic matter and for the need “to present human and nonhuman actants on a less vertical plane than is common” (ix). To this end, Bennett decisively “bracket[s] the question of the human” and “elide[s] the rich and diverse literature on subjectivity and its genesis, its conditions of possibility, and its boundaries” (ix). Chen, though allied to Bennett’s interests in the subversive, affective potential of the nonliving and inorganic, is less concerned with a strict focus on the nonhuman. Rooted in the contested notion of animacy in linguistics, Chen uses animacy to “theorize current anxieties around the production of humanness” and “rewrite conditions of intimacy”—i.e., the politicized, racialized, and queered relations—among entities sorted into “stubborn binary systems of difference, including dynamism/stasis, life/death, subject/object, speech/nonspeech, human/animal, natural body/cyborg” (3). This chapter takes cues from Chen’s

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<sup>18</sup> In the same article, Brown writes that “the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (4). Although this observation remains couched in terms of a subject-object binary—the limits of which many new materialist thinkers, including Brown himself, have long since recognized—his work nevertheless operates upon an attention to the richness of the material relations between living and nonliving entities. Brown, in his later reflections upon and revisions of thing theory, adjusts his defense of the “perennially demonized subject-object distinction” by conceding that these relations should be assumed to be unstable categories (*Other Things* 20).



methodology—in its revision of the fraught relations between human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, living and nonliving—in order to rethink the relations between the human characters of *Our Mutual Friend* and waste, between gold and garbage, between dust-heaps and ecology. Only when we consider dust in light of its animacy do we open ourselves up to the full structural strangeness of dust in *Our Mutual Friend*.

The novel's dust is assertively omnipresent. Every day on his way home from work, Reginald Wilfer passes the Harmon dust-heaps, “a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors” (33). Dust intrudes upon our notice throughout the novel's spaces—not merely at the dust-heaps, where it is most concentrated. The recyclable sawdust that is continually blown out of the sawpit near the Thames is uncooperative at best and combative at worst, and omnipresent:

The grating wind sawed rather than blew; and as it sawed, the sawdust whirled about the sawpit. Every street was a sawpit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the sawdust blinding him and choking him.

That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails. (144)

The sawdust is uncontainable and transformative, levelling all characters, in spite of class, and all spaces to the condition of labourers and labouring sites. It gets “gyrated here and there and everywhere,” and yet “hangs on,” gaining momentum and purpose as the list of verbs approaches agency of movement—from the more passive “hangs,” “flutters,” and “caught,” to “haunts,” “drinks,” “cowers,” “shudders,” and “seeks rest.” As if imbued with the privileges of life, this non-life substance, though the discarded

remains of industry and production, lays claim to the streets of London and disrupts the lives of the characters that attempt to pass through them.

Dust in the novel exists in excess of human life or interest, at times cooperating with human characters and at times overwhelming them. Nicodemus Boffin—alternately called “The Golden Dustman,” “Dustman,” and “our dusty friend”—is, as a product of his livelihood, “a pretty fair scholar in dust,” and has so profited by it that he is addressed primarily by names that reinstate his relation to dust (134, 501, 656, 185). Boffin’s identity, vocation, and domestic life all centre upon waste. Indeed, the absence of dust is stranger in this world than its presence; when the Boffins first enter the Bower, their new home, the lack of dust on the floor is linked with the house being “not sufficiently imbued with life” (183). Dust, then, may be a potent equalizer of people and spaces or an indicator of comfortable domesticity; it may exist on a geological scale or be collected, sifted, and profitably repurposed. The inability of any one of these categories to describe Dickensian dust marks its alien materiality and implies an easily missed animacy. This categorical ambivalence is bolstered by dust’s persistent and inconvenient presence throughout the city, which challenges any notions we might entertain of waste’s passivity. When Chen teases out the mutually constitutive relations between humans and nonhumans in *Animacies*, her primary concern is in reframing “the precise conditions of the application of ‘life’ and ‘death,’ the working ontologies and hierarchicalized bodies of interest” (1). The dust of *Our Mutual Friend* has no less agency and shows no less animation for being “matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise ‘wrong’” (Chen 2). The novel’s characters are continually handling, covered in, choking on, or brushing off dust in some form or other, and yet dust continues to cling to people, places, and things with dogged tenacity. “A grey dusty withered evening in London city has not a hopeful aspect,” particularly “when the City grit gets into the hair and eyes and skin, and when the fallen leaves of the few unhappy City trees grind down in corners under wheels of wind” (393). The proliferation of dust is insistent, demands notice.

Though omnipresent throughout Dickensian London, dust has been amassed in mountainous quantities on the Harmon estate, providing a concentrated example of a waste ecology. This concentration is artificial, being established by the labourers who

have gathered and transported all of the dust on the estate, but is still linked to the proliferation of dust, which is a necessary condition for its being gathered, sifted, and sold. In discussing the dust-heaps as a waste ecology, this does not exclude the dust beyond the Harmon estate and scattered throughout the city; yet, as a concentrated accumulation of dust in one specific environment, the Harmon dust-heaps do stand as a ready glimpse of a broader ecology of urban dust. Harmon's is its own institution, well-known by its nickname "Harmony Jail" under the former owner, and remains an institution after the estate is conferred upon the Boffins, who rechristen the place "Boffin's Bower" (53). The residents of "the Bower district" identify the Boffins by their legacy of dust, cheering whenever the couple come and go from the Bower "such congratulations as 'Nod-dy Bof-fin!' 'Bof-fin's mon-ey!' 'Down with the Dust, Bof-fin!'" and other similar compliments" (103, 102). The broken syllables of these liberal laudations suggest the fragmented identity that is part of Boffin's inheritance—money, the potential for a miserly corruption, and a dust-riddled title. And though Boffin turns out to be proof against the miserliness of his benefactor, his role in the scheme to reform Bella requires him to engage in play-acting for the first time. There is a sense, in other words, that Boffin's new association with the dust-heaps has fragmented his once cohesive and uncomplicated social identity into multiple and conflicting personas, however superficially or harmlessly.

Before detailing further the dust-heaps' fragmentation of the characters' identities, some summary is due of the parameters of the Harmon legacy. The late Harmon Sr., made rich, miserly, and vindictive by his success as a dust trader, leaves behind a will in which he bequeaths the majority of his estate to his son, John, on condition that he marry a specific woman of his father's choice. That woman, Bella Wilfer, whom Harmon Sr. only saw when she was a fastidious, tantrum-prone child, is evidently chosen as a double punishment for his son—as a trap to bind his son into an unhappy as well as a mercenary marriage. The same will bequeaths the entire estate to the honest, hard-working labourers Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, should John decline the terms of his inheritance. The events of the novel begin when John Harmon, en route to London to claim this inheritance, is believed drowned—that is, a body is found in the river with papers identifying him as John Harmon. The true John Harmon, drugged, impersonated, and almost murdered by a sailor

named George Radfoot, narrowly escapes and his would-be impersonator is murdered instead. John Harmon, meanwhile, lives under an assumed name, works as secretary to the Boffins, and falls in love with Bella Wilfer. The Harmon will around which this labyrinthine plot revolves, it turns out, is one of “many wills made by [John’s] unhappy and self-tormenting father” (787). Another will, discovered by Wegg, bequeaths the entire estate to the Crown. The final will, revealed by the end of the novel, reviles John and his sister by name and bequeaths the whole estate unconditionally upon the Boffins. Boffin, discovering that John is still living, produces and has legally instated the final Harmon will but only on the condition that John accepts his rightful inheritance and accepts the majority of the estate as a gift.

The story of the Harmon legacy is a story of fragmented identities. In writing and burying several wills, Harmon Sr.’s legal agency<sup>19</sup> is shattered into fragments and archived in the dust-heaps. In burying his wills in dust, Harmon Sr. effectively entrusts his legacy to the dust, forcing his heirs to interact with it if they are to reclaim their rightful identities. If his daughter, John’s sister, is to claim her dues as a member of the Harmon family, she must trade her current identity for one dominated by dust. His son, John, has his identity held hostage by the dust-heaps in a stronger sense, having to go so far as to abandon his name until he is finally willing to engage with the dust-heaps and his father’s legacy.

For the Harmon family, engaging with the dust-heaps requires exposing their identities to the mercies of dust. We see this early in the novel when Mortimer Lightwood, lawyer to the Harmon estate, first introduces the history of the Harmon estate at a dinner party. The language that Lightwood uses to relate how Harmon Sr. cast off his daughter is telling of the powerful influence of the dust-heaps. Miss Harmon refused her father’s plans for her marriage—an arrangement that, in Lightwood’s words, “would make Dust of her heart and Dust of her life—in short, would set her up, on a very extensive scale, in her father’s business” (14). The ubiquitous power of the dust-heaps is immediately established by this

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<sup>19</sup> Also, as Venus remarks, Harmon Sr.’s remains have been buried in the mounds; what is left of his physical identity is also entrusted to the dust.

rhetorical slippage into waste metaphors; dust not only gets physically scattered across the city, but also seeps into the language and conversation of those directly or indirectly concerned with it. “Dust,” capitalized as if a proper noun, is evocative enough that Lightwood need not explicitly state his meaning that the marriage would break her heart and bring misery to her life. Moreover, Lightwood’s remark illustrates the privileged position that dust occupies over humans within the Harmon estate. The arranged marriage, he facetiously suggests, was intended not for the growth of the Harmon family but for the propagation of more Dust. The business of making dust of one’s heart and life is the business of orienting every aspect of one’s life to dust, of surrendering one’s will to dust. Harmon Sr.’s multiple wills are one of several ways in which the novel buries human will within dust. Human will—whether agency or identities—waxes and wanes within waste ecologies.

Lightwood’s remark speaks, ultimately, to the profound extent to which anyone who enters into a relationship with waste risks having their identity fundamentally altered by that association. Entering into a relationship with dust does not merely extend to shaping the language of the text; dust splits, fragments, and reforms the characters’ identities. Harmon Sr., a successful capitalist who profited enormously in trading dust, becomes a miser who hoards his wealth—becomes, effectively, the exact opposite of a capitalist in his obstruction of the economic circulation of goods and wealth. The waste that he collects effectively goes to waste. Furthermore, each succession of Harmon Sr.’s many wills negates the others, making wastepaper or trash of his own legacy. The multiple wills can be seen to be miniature waste ecologies; in their multitude, they lose any value for humans, while also attaining a certain animacy and currency of their own as a destabilizing force in the novel.

Where the Harmons and their associates live in awe of the threats that the Harmon dust ecology poses to their social identities, Silas Wegg is one character who actively seeks to protect his physical identity—that is, his bodily integrity. Upon entering a relationship with the dust-heaps, Wegg becomes a complex demonstration of the ways in which dust, as a category of waste, expands to encompass all manner of matter. Having come into better prospects, Wegg attempts to purchase his amputated leg bone from Mr. Venus,

who had purchased the bone from a hospital porter that he might use it in a human skeleton composite. Wegg explains his wish to reclaim his lost leg bone, saying, “I shouldn’t like . . . under such circumstances, to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself like a genteel person” (82). This impulse to “collect” himself—to be the sole custodian of his fragmented body—originates from Wegg’s new association with Boffin and the dust-heaps. It is only after entering into “such circumstances” does the risk of becoming “dispersed” occur to Wegg. Venus also confirms that bones have been found in the dust-heaps before.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Wegg takes this precaution of collecting himself; his access to the mounds opens his body up to the risk of becoming physically part of the dust-heaps. Wegg’s desire to collect himself makes real the metaphor of the permeability of bodies and dust—makes a reality out of making “Dust” of one’s life. Wegg himself has been recycled—his amputated leg was purchased, among a “various lot” (82), by Venus, and was set aside for the purpose of being articulated into a skeleton. Though Wegg finds the means to purchase back his own leg—bringing up, meanwhile, the question of whether or not Venus ever had a right to purchase it in the first place—this curious exchange reveals the complexity of the matter of Wegg’s “dispersed” identity.

In the same conversation, both Wegg and Venus refer to the leg bone simply as Wegg himself and not as a separate object or entity from his living body. Venus, who purchases human bones in bulk before sorting and assembling them into “miscellaneous” (79) skeletons, is annoyed by the uniqueness of Wegg’s leg bone, which prevents Venus from using it as he wishes. Their peculiar conversation runs as follows:

“And how have I been going on, this long time, Mr. Venus?”

“Very bad,” says Mr. Venus, uncompromisingly.

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<sup>20</sup> “The old gentleman [Harmon Sr.] wanted to know the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust,” Venus tells Wegg, “and many’s the bone, and feather, and what not, that he’s brought to me” (84).

“What? Am I still at home?” asks Wegg, with an air of surprise.

. . .

“I don’t know . . . to what to attribute it, Mr. Wegg. I can’t work you into a miscellaneous one, nohow. Do what I will, you can’t be got to fit. Anybody with a passable knowledge would pick you out at a look, and say—‘No go! Don’t match!’”

“Well, but hang it, Mr. Venus,” Wegg expostulates with some little irritation, “that can’t be personal and peculiar in *me*. It must often happen with miscellaneous ones.” (79)

Both in this dialogue and throughout their conversation, Wegg and Venus use personal pronouns—“I,” “you,” “*me*”—rather than impersonal nouns or pronouns such as “the leg,” “the bone,” “it,” and so forth. Wegg, who is bargaining for the lowest monetary estimation of his leg, at first encourages Venus’s dissatisfaction with such comments as, “Come! According to your own account, I’m not worth much” (82). However, Wegg soon conflates Venus’s unsatisfactory assessment of his leg bone as a “personal and peculiar” reflection of himself as a whole. He therefore takes it as a series of insults when Venus says to him bluntly, “*I* never saw the likes of you,” “I wish I’d never bought you of the Hospital Porter,” and “you might turn out valuable yet, as a— . . . as a Monstrosity, if you’ll excuse me” (82).

The dispersal of Wegg’s identity is a more profound issue than it appears. Wegg himself has been partially recycled into dust, and his desire to “collect” himself makes real the metaphor of the permeability of bodies and dust—makes a reality of making Dust of one’s life. By tacitly acknowledging the recyclable potential of his own body, Wegg becomes a rare instance of non-anthropocentric recycling, or a form of recycling that furthers the development of a waste ecology rather than a given capitalist economy. Wegg’s identity is fragmented, in tension—extending at once to his living, animate body that speaks, moves, and plots against the Boffins, as well as to the leg bone that Venus purchased from a hospital porter as “one of a wariou lot” (82). There is also the obvious and deliberate pun that part of Wegg risks becoming literal trash while the moral

character that forms the rest of his identity falls into figurative waste—a condition exacerbated by his proximity to dust. “Dust,” as an omnivorous category of waste, expands to include anything—it encompasses the dust on floor, industrial debris, biodegraded vegetables, and human remains. This expandability comprises the most threatening aspect of dust. Those who attempt to enforce binary categories upon this material, those who are afraid of dust or garbage—the “outlaw underside” (Boscagli 228) of commodity culture—and are determined to subdue it as an other, end up paradoxically imbuing this other with a subtle biopower and end up acknowledging, in spite of themselves, its animacy.

The Harmon dust-heaps reveal how waste ecologies demand a negotiation of the boundaries of the human self. That self can be understood as bodily integrity (as in Wegg’s case) or moral integrity (as in John Harmon’s and Boffin’s cases), and the dust-heaps represent a threat to each. Wegg must assert his right to “collect” himself in order to assert a boundary between his own body and the collectable bones and miscellanies often found in the dust and repurposed as composite skeletons by Venus. Boffin pretends to have been spoiled by his wealth in order to demonstrate the moral dangers of a life of dust, and figuratively loses himself (if momentarily) in his adopted persona. In both cases, the perceived dangers of the dust-heaps comes from a sense of the categorical and ontological permeability between human and nonhuman entities. To “make Dust” of one’s heart and life—to bind oneself to dust, to submit to an ecology of dust—is, in other words, to put one’s selfhood at stake, and it is left to the individual characters themselves to guard against the corrosion of their identities.

### 1.3

The novel’s purest expression of a massive waste ecology is the Thames, portrayals of which many consider a staple of Dickens’s fiction. As Peter Ackroyd remarks, the “river runs through Dickens’s fiction just as it runs through the city itself. . . . No previous writer had so well captured the lachrymose and minatory aspects of the river. It was the river of secrets, the river of mist and fog, the river of night and thus the river of mystery” (*Thames* 326). While the dust-heaps were initiated and collected under Harmon’s aegis, the Thames is a self-organizing mass of material that indiscriminately swallows up dirt,



debris, and human corpses alike, rendering them indistinguishable. The power of the Thames is overwhelming; human concerns are subordinate to its ebbs and flows. When John Harmon is supposed to have drowned in the Thames, a sense of the river's movement attaches to the resulting sensationalized news: "the tides on which it had been borne to the knowledge of men . . . ebbed and flowed . . . until at last, after a long interval of slack water, it got out to sea and drifted away" (31). These same waters leave their mark throughout the neighbourhoods by the shore, including "some muddy alleys that might have been deposited by the last ill-savoured tide" (24), where every visible object boasts of "the spoiling influences of water" (172) of the river's power to transform the living into non-living waste. The characters in the novel who drown or almost drown serve as periodic reminders of that "spoiling," that transformation from one category to another.

Like the dust-heaps, the Thames of the novel is comprised of an assortment of matter, and it is tempting to distinguish between the water and waste therein. Dickens was, after all, writing *Our Mutual Friend* in the wake of the Great Stink and published the novel during a decade of debate surrounding what Rosemary Ashton calls "the problem of the Thames" (2). For the purposes of this analysis, I refrain from parsing too minutely the types of matter circulated by the river. The water, though not a form of waste when perfectly distilled, is fundamental to the creation of the fluid waste of the river; the water is not merely a medium of conveyance but the originator of much that becomes river waste. Drowned bodies, fallen debris, and fragments of ships—these are all turned into waste because of their contact with the river. Where the dust-heaps are unmoving, massively accumulated waste, the river in its circulation and hastening of the biodegrading process represents an organization of, as well as the active creation of, waste. Waste in this case cannot be considered separately from the river because its waters are fundamentally involved as a physical foundation of the waste ecology; the Thames's waters are inextricably implicated in the origins, movement, value, decay, and unwholesomeness of the trash they convey. The river's animacy rests in the relation between waste and the capacity of water, a dynamic complex to which any additional material thrown into the river contributes. I will therefore treat water and waste as inseparable in this case.

Up until the 1860s, the Thames was comprised of such riverside communities as had adapted, as much as was possible, to the “spoiling influences of water” (172). The novel, set during this time, dramatizes this transient urban ecosystem, which was soon to be transformed by growing concerns regarding its sanitation (or lack thereof). As Ashton, Allen, Eileen Cleere, Ackroyd, and many others have observed, the journalism of the 1860s was full of debates on the necessity of sanitary improvements to the river—public conversations that paralleled the planning and eventual construction of the Thames Embankment. The Embankment construction, however, required the total clearing and forced migration of the riverside communities of labourers. As Hannah Steyne notes in her archaeological analysis of mid-Victorian riverside communities, “[t]he engineering genius and sanitary improvements achieved by the Embankment construction have overshadowed the implications of the wholesale removal of employment opportunities along the riverside, upon which many of the working classes depended” (3). *Our Mutual Friend* is imbued with new significance, therefore, when we consider the novel’s Thames and communities of “waterside character[s]” (150) as a transient, complex ecology of material relations on the verge of being lost through the riverside clearances and Embankment construction.

Dickens’s complex rendition of the Thames carries the weight of its historical context, including the Thames Embankment, the Great Stink, and Chadwick’s sanitary reforms. Yet, even during momentous historical countermeasures against the dangerous wastes of the Thames, Victorians held an ambivalent relationship with this encroaching waste ecology, even as it threatened their lives. Allen questions the assumption that the Victorian sanitary reforms were universally embraced, noting the diverse responses among the middling-classes to the benefits of the sanitary reforms proposed by Mayhew and Chadwick. Ralph Smith also points out the historically uneven response to the Victorian sanitation movement. According to Smith, medical professionals—aware that the majority of disease was spread by contagion—were sceptical of the sanitation movement’s fixation on the miasma theory of disease, though ultimately tolerant of the movement’s championing of sewage systems and public hygiene. Smith also finds that, in spite of Dickens’s documented enthusiasm for Chadwick’s work, Dickens’s journalism expresses misgivings about the sanitarian movement—particularly its tendency to blame

the spread of disease on domestic mismanagement by women, on the labouring class, or on the supposed carelessness of those living by the waterside. These misgivings made their way into the art and literature of the period. Cleere argues that discourses of sanitation and of aesthetics comingled in unexpectedly fruitful ways specifically because narratives of sanitation reform were “more dilatory, more contradictory, more contested” than one might expect (3).

The river’s animacy as a waste ecology is demonstrated through its consistent threat to human life. Where the dust-heaps reorder in subtle ways the possibilities of identity for those who orbit around them, the river represents a more existential threat to those who must interact with it. This waste ecology, having reached a critical mass by the constant input of matter, fascinates and fixates human characters with its power to transform everything into the same indistinguishable ooze. The river demonstrates its animacy in its omnivorous, indiscriminating consumption of material. Deathly fixation upon the river gains additional meanings when that river is a waste ecology of shifting materialities. While I will return to the more tangible threat that the river poses to human characters, I first take up the river’s animacy in terms of the mesmeric hold that it seems to exert over those who come into contact with it.

As Riderhood rows a police inspector, Eugene Wrayburn, and Mortimer Lightwood toward Gaffer’s boat, the passengers cannot help noticing the threatening aspect of “all the objects among which they crept” (171):

Not a lumbering black barge, with its cracked and blistered side impending over them, but seemed to suck at the river with a thirst for sucking them under. And everything so vaunted the spoiling influences of water—discoloured copper, rotted wood, honey-combed stone, green dank deposit—that the after consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event. (172)

The spoiling influences of water—rust, rot, wear, mould—describe how that which comes into contact with water becomes waste. It is not only the “main event” of drowning that frightens Wrayburn and Lightwood here; the “after consequences,” the

decomposition, the waste-becoming process, is equally formidable. Where the waste of the dust-heaps seems to corrode identities, the river asserts a basic, categorical confusion. Characters become bodies, ships offer underwater submersion instead of above-water passage, fuel becomes rotten wood. Even Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood, who are entirely unaccustomed to riverside life, begin to confuse whether they are trying to track down a criminal, or are becoming criminals themselves. Before venturing out on the water with Riderhood, Wrayburn, conscience-struck by the disastrous effects that their investigation might have upon Lizzie, periodically tells Lightwood that their participation makes him feel as uncomfortable as a guilty criminal—“like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket,” “Guy Fawkes and a Sneak in the area both at once,” and the perpetrator of “[t]hree burglaries, two forgeries, and a midnight assassination” (162, 164, 168). Mortimer affirms that he feels uneasy also, and Wrayburn grimly proposes: “[n]ext time (with a view to our peace of mind) we’ll commit the crime, instead of taking the criminal” (165). Hyperbolic and facetious though these exchanges are, the “[i]nfluence of locality,” as Lightwood puts it, is profound (164). The very ale they drink “[t]astes like the wash of the river,” and Wrayburn “feel[s] as if [he] had been half drowned, and swallowing a gallon of it” (164). The spoiling influences of water are pervasive, here. Under such circumstances, the riverside characters who scavenge, who try to do something with the river’s waste, seem less like characters recycling and more like people wearily submitting to a waste ecology.

The river indiscriminately circulates, biodegrades, and swallows up the living and nonliving alike. The power of the river, however, is not the power to bestow life and death; rather, its animacy lies in its excesses—the overwhelming quantity of the matter that flows in and out of the river. The river may house, redistribute, and even equalize the materials that come within its ambit, but these results are incidental to the massive, geological scale on which the river operates. In their material excess, both the Harmon dust-heaps and the Thames are formidable for having grown to such critical masses that they become ecologies of waste.

This river waste ecology exerts a strange, mesmeric influence upon humans. As Bradley Headstone prepares to murder his rival in love, Wrayburn, he stares down “with a ghastly

relish” (635) over the brink of Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, mesmerized by the prospect of certain death that the water presents for anyone who falls into it. Standing on a literal brink, the schoolmaster contemplates the figurative boundary between murder and suicide. Riderhood, the lock’s keeper, stands next to Bradley and observes that:

There was a very dark expression on his face; an expression that the Rogue found it hard to understand. It was fierce and full of purpose; but the purpose might have been as much against himself as against another. If he had stepped back for a spring, taken a leap, and thrown himself in, it would have been no surprising sequel to the look. Perhaps his troubled soul, set upon some violence, did hover for the moment between that violence and another. (636)

Bradley’s fierce, purposeful look is not one of moral anguish; he is not struggling against his determination to “set upon some violence,” but is one of indecision as to the target of that violence. Instead of a moral problem, Bradley is contemplating a material one—that is, which living body to transform into a nonliving body. The river, in its relation to death, disrupts distinctions such as social status, wit, and ability. Indeed, the moral outrage and jealous resentment that fuel Bradley’s murder attempt are altered in the face of the material power of the river—so much so that Bradley considers his own death as an equivalent to, or acceptable substitute for, the death of another.

Some characters try to resist the waste ecology and the intimate field of material relations into which they are woven. These characters assert the integrity of living bodies in opposition to bodies of waste, return to those “stubborn binary systems of difference” that reassert animate hierarchies such as “dynamism/stasis, life/death, subject/object, speech/nonspeech, human/animal, natural body/cyborg” (Chen 3). In the opening chapter, Riderhood tries to point out Gaffer’s hypocrisy in shunning Riderhood for stealing from a living man, asking how Gaffer might react if he had been accused of robbing a dead man. Gaffer responds:

‘You COULDN’T do it. . . . Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? T’other world. What world does money belong to? This world.

How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. It's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man.'  
(4-5)

Unlike his daughter, Lizzie, Gaffer harbours no horror or revulsion of the lifeless human body because the moment that a body ceases to be animated it loses its subjecthood—or, as he tells Riderhood, the ability to own, want, spend, or claim. Most characters, however, maintain a predictable aversion to the human corpse—especially Lizzie, for whom the river and the dead are irrevocably linked. As Peter Schwenger observes in *Tears of Things*, the human corpse is an emblem of the border between subject and object, “[f]or if the dead body has now become object, it is not wholly so; it bears the imprint of a residual subjectivity, residue within residue” (157). We are disturbed by the corpse’s abject character, by the fact that that “[w]e cannot expel a corpse with the same indifference with which we leave behind the wastes of the body,” and by how the corpse sits within “a disturbing liminal state between subject and object” (158). In *Our Mutual Friend*, the corpses in the river are disturbing because characters “cannot help but identify the subject with this object” (Schwenger 158). The river, with its circulating abject bodies, then, threatens characters with the possibility that subject-object relations are unfixed, malleable, porous.

Lizzie is subject to what the novel calls her “fancies” (5). In the first chapter, Lizzie sees the sunset light up a stain at the bottom of her father’s boat, and this stain resembles “the outline of a muffled human form, coloured . . . as though with diluted blood” (2). These “fancies” operate more as visions than as imaginative delusions, generating a curious power and insight. Lizzie often sits by the fireplace in her home and spends her evenings looking into “the hollow down by the flare” or the hollow space within the flames produced by the reaction of fuel and oxygen, which is visible just above the burning coals, and which produces a peculiar effect on her (30):

‘It’s that dull glow near it [the burning coals], coming and going, that I mean. When I look at it of an evening, it comes like pictures to me, Charley.’

‘Show us a picture,’ said the boy. ‘Tell us where to look.’

‘Ah! It wants my eyes, Charley.’ (28)

Lizzie’s “pictures” are one instance of the visionary wisdom—expressed as a second sight—that she exercises throughout the novel. These images convey a range of knowledge, sometimes giving her insights into the past and sometimes appearing as “a fortune-telling one; a future one” (29). We see instances of Lizzie’s fireside fortune-telling—for Charley, when she predicts his breaking off from their father and leaving behind his riverside life—for Gaffer, when she predicts her father’s ruin by Riderhood’s slanderous accusations of murder<sup>21</sup>—and even for Bella Wilfer, when she predicts Bella’s “heart well worth winning, and well won” (529). In another instance of Lizzie’s second sight, she wonders whether her insights come of communicating with the dead. When Lizzie discovers from Abbey Potterson that Riderhood has been slanderously accusing her father of murder, she recalls seeing Riderhood creeping near the site where Gaffer found the body believed to be John Harmon’s. Reflecting on this sudden memory, and its suggestion that Riderhood was involved in the Harmon murder, Lizzie wonders, “Can it be a truth? That was put into my mind by the dead?”—a question that the narrator remarks she asks “rather of the fire than of the hostess of the Fellowship Porters” (68). Consulting the “fire,” as is typical of her informal fortune-telling practice, Lizzie wonders if the “dead”—which, in this case, being the abject waste of the river waste ecology, can be taken as synonymous with the river as a whole—has put this knowledge into her mind, just as the river fuels the fire that conveys to her various “pictures.”

Lizzie’s connection to the river instigates a series of insights on her own and others’ position within a waste ecology. As she tells Charley, only Lizzie herself can see these

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<sup>21</sup> Gaffer, angrily gesticulating when he discovers Charley has left home, happens to be holding a knife as he does so. Lizzie, who knows that people have begun to shun her father on suspicion of murder, tells Gaffer that, while she is certain that her father should never hurt anyone, the sight of him wielding a knife “was too dreadful to bear; for it looked— . . . O it looked—” (76). Lizzie’s “fancies” always take the shape of visions, whether in hollow of the flares, in her father’s boat, or in the comfort of her own home, when she imaginatively visualizes her father under the new light cast on him by Riderhood’s slander.

“pictures,” which are fuelled literally by debris washed ashore by the river. Lizzie’s fancies are a product of her contradictory revulsion of and attraction to the river—a contradictory relationship that reveals her recognition of the river’s power as a waste ecology and of her own position within it. Caught between resisting the field of material relations that the river represents and embracing the same, Lizzie tries to explain this confusing relationship to her brother—saying, “[t]o please myself, I could not be too far from that river,” and yet “can’t get away from it” (228). Lizzie feels she has little agency in her relationship with the Thames, claiming that “[i]t’s no purpose of mine that I live by it still” (228). Yet this recognition of her lack of agency regarding the river is appropriate when the substance of her fancies revolve around the humbling notion of her and others’ position within that waste ecology.

Neither her father nor her brother has patience with Lizzie’s propensity to give way to her ambivalent “fancies,” which they do not share. As Gaffer looks back at the drowned corpse he has in tow, the narrator observes: “A neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies” (5). The “fancy” here is the notion that this human could return to life, might have survived its fatal interaction with the river, which ominously mimics “faint changes of expression.” In his resistance to fancies, Gaffer maintains that there is no recovery from wastehood, that the river’s power is absolute, and steadfastly ignores any suggestion of its return to life. Though this clear-eyed view is necessary for the execution of his profession, Gaffer perhaps forgets that Lizzie’s dread of the river is well-founded—particularly in view of Gaffer’s own death in the river shortly afterwards. Being so completely involved in a waste ecology, Gaffer cannot escape the fact of his inevitable transformation into waste. While Gaffer may realize that there is no return from waste, Lizzie understands the extent to which they are all implicated within a waste ecology and the potential dangers of still deeper involvement.

Gaffer and his son Charley each attempt to steer Lizzie away from her fancifulness, though their reasons differ: Gaffer admonishes Lizzie for her ungrateful dislike of the river, which provides their livelihood; Charley rebukes her continued and undue focus on



the river after their father's death, when they have worked to free themselves from its influence. Charley periodically begs Lizzie to "control [her] fancies" (228), which have led her to house with the eccentric and fanciful Jenny Wren, particularly as Lizzie's intuitions would seem to inconvenience his own social ambitions. While Gaffer cannot understand Lizzie's dread of the river, Charley cannot comprehend Lizzie's involuntary affinity with the same. Charley, like his father, is unable to see beyond those interests necessary for his immediate survival, nor to fathom the full import of Lizzie's fancies: "Lizzie has as much thought as the best . . . Too much, perhaps, without teaching. I used to call the fire at home her books, for she was always full of fancies—sometimes quite wise fancies, considering—when she sat looking at it" (231). In this instance, Charley categorizes Lizzie's wisdom as of a kind that approaches his own formal education. This acknowledgement, however, diminishes the radical extent to which her understanding, stemming from an interaction with the river's waste, differs from his. At other times, Charley recognizes a gulf between Lizzie's river insights and his own education, though not necessarily one that does justice to her abilities:

"You are such a dreamer," said the boy, with his former petulance. "It was all very well when we sat before the fire—when we looked into the hollow down by the flare—but we are looking into the real world now."

"Ah, we were looking into the real world then, Charley!"  
(228)

Charley and Lizzie stage an implicit debate between the reality of social systems and that of broader ecosystems beyond the control and complete knowledge of humans. And while Lizzie tries to use this fortune-telling strategically throughout the novel to induce herself and others to live up to their potential, she is eventually cast off by her brother, unable and unwilling to discard her fancies for his.

Lizzie's aptitude within the river waste ecology originates in her psychic connection to fires. Fires are structurally dynamic, determined as they are by chaotic ecological variables such as the movement and ratio of certain gases in a given space. The stochastic quality of fires—their illegibility, effectively—imbues Lizzie's fortune-telling with

ecological as well as temporal insight. Caught between her father's and her brother's interests, Lizzie emerges with an insight superior to both. In spite of the gendered coding of and attempts to control Lizzie's "fancies," she remains the novel's most capable judge of the river and of her family's relation to it. This incisive perspective allows her an agency on the riverside. While her father is practised at hauling corpses out of the Thames, Lizzie successfully pulls Eugene Wrayburn, still living, from its waters. Inspired by "[h]er old bold life and habit," Lizzie spots, rows out to, and retrieves the first body she has ever hauled out from the river (699):

An untrained sight would never have seen by the moonlight  
what she saw at the length of a few strokes astern. She saw  
the drowning figure rise to the surface, slightly struggle,  
and as if by instinct turn over on its back to float. Just so  
had she first dimly seen the face which she now dimly saw  
again. (700)

The repeated references to the skills that Lizzie previously acquired from helping her father, and which turn out to be invaluable, contextualize Eugene's rescue within Gaffer's work of retrieving corpses from the water. Not only does Lizzie possess more than an "untrained sight"; she has developed a trained vision in two senses—a keen eye for the river's movements, and the second sight by which she reads the river as a waste ecology.<sup>22</sup> The fanciful vision that Lizzie sees at the beginning of the novel—"the outline of a muffled human form, coloured . . . as though with diluted blood" (2)—is realized in Eugene's near-drowned and bloodied body. Lizzie's psychic power is less an ability that she can call forth at her desire, and more her willingness to be involved in and subject to the river waste ecology. Just as human will waxes and wanes in the Harmon dust-heaps, so do human will, agency, and knowledge wax and wane in Dickens's Thames. Successfully navigating such a river can sometimes require the suppression of the human ego and interests, and the adoption of mediumistic neutrality.

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<sup>22</sup> The Hexams are also playfully connected to the occult by the pun embedded in that name—"Hex 'em."

The river supplies some characters with a living—as with Gaffer and Riderhood—but this living necessitates a constant confrontation with nonliving remains. We see both aspects of riverside life when Gaffer admonishes Lizzie for disliking the river, saying:

How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie?  
The very fire that warmed you when you were a baby, was  
picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very  
basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very  
rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of  
a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another. (3)

Coal, extraneous goods, scrap wood, money from dead corpses—all of these are harvested from the river. For Gaffer, the river plays a foundational—even maternal—role in Lizzie’s life. From her earliest years, the physical markers of Lizzie’s identity and experience have been provided by an implicitly nurturing Thames. Gaffer’s reading of the river is therefore not merely anthropocentric; it is anthropomorphic. While such rhetoric grants the Thames agency, in a manner that mirrors my own argument, the intentionality implied to the river erases the destruction, decay, and death that initiate these gifts. Gaffer cannot see that human profit and disaster are alike incidental within this broader waste ecology. The same resources from the river that benefit the Hexams are bound up in the loss, disaster, or death of others. Gaffer unwittingly demonstrates the river’s disregard for human life, and in so doing, demonstrates his own. The living granted by the Thames’s waste ecology is taken from disastrous losses upstream. In this way, the Thames can be life-sustaining and life-threatening, but these two experiences exist on a spectrum and cannot be separated one from the other.

Thus, the riverside communities generate their living from the material excesses of the river waste ecology. These excesses, however, are not merely the physical quantity of river waste that circulates through the city; they encompass the categorical confusion of materials that the river enforces upon all who come into contact with it. Drowned bodies, industrial debris, water—the river melts these together into an indistinguishable mass of slime and ooze that leaves these materials categorically in excess of the classifications they might have enjoyed as individual, discrete entities. The river’s excesses, in this sense, overwhelm basic binaries such as living and dead, product and waste. We see this

categorical confusion when we examine more closely the Hexams' relation to the river. Riderhood describes the latter's successful retrieval of a drowned corpse from the river as being "in luck" (3). This common expression is appropriate to the neutral, unfeeling, chance-based odds of the Hexams' way of life. The idea of Gaffer's being "in luck" is ironic when that luck is based on the death of another, when it implies an unwillingness to view the river as an ecology. This unwillingness to view the river as a waste ecology—as a cycle of waste—dooms Gaffer to drowning. The same phrase comes up again when Riderhood leads a search party in quest of Gaffer. Seeing Gaffer's empty boat with a corpse tied to it, Riderhood assumes Gaffer is "in luck again" (170). However, the "luck" turns out to be Gaffer's own body. Gaffer gets entangled in his own ropes and dies occupying the same position of the many corpses that he has fished from the river.<sup>23</sup> In that moment, being "in luck" acquires multiple meanings—Gaffer's successful retrieval of a corpse and Gaffer's becoming that corpse—that sums up Gaffer's absorption into the transformative, uncategorizable excesses of the river waste ecology.

"Luck" describes effectively the reason that Gaffer and Lizzie have benefitted so long from the river without harm. Lizzie, whose fancies have foreseen Gaffer's sudden switch from receiving the river's resources to becoming one of those resources himself, joins the number of those who have lost rather than the minority who only gain by the river. As the company tries to haul in the corpse, it resists the will of the search party (172):

He tried easy now; but the luck resisted; wouldn't come.

‘I mean to have it, and the boat too,’ said Mr. Inspector,  
playing the line.

But still the luck resisted; wouldn't come. (172)

The "luck," a form of abject waste, is Gaffer's drowned body and the result of that man's final attempt to seize another instance of "luck." Like the thing that looks back, that

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<sup>23</sup> Riderhood also gets run down by a coal barge and almost drowns, and then is eventually murdered by drowning, in spite of his insistence that "him as has been brought out o' drowning can never be drowned" (636)

disrupts and subverts the anthropocentrism of human endeavours, “the luck resisted; wouldn’t come.” The agentic force at play when Gaffer’s “luck resisted” is grammatically assigned not to the humans who are trying to haul in the body, but to the inanimate corpse that “wouldn’t come.” Gaffer’s abject body, with its thing-like resistance to the Inspector’s investigation, here serves as an emissary of the river waste ecology and demonstrates how the novel’s waste is invested with animacy. Gaffer’s anthropomorphic reading of the river as a benevolent “best friend” therefore proves incomplete. From a non-anthropocentric point of view, Gaffer’s death perfectly suits the workings of the river as a waste ecology. His body becomes a contribution to the river’s mass, to the power of its currents, and his body has fulfilled the natural conclusion of living by and within a waste ecology—at some point, he must become that waste. Both his liveness and his death are secondary to the broader circulations of the river.

## 1.4

The waste ecologies in *Our Mutual Friend* transform everything within their influence. On an individual scale, waste appears as agentic, vibrant, animate matter. As a collective, the accrued waste gives rise to ecosystems of interdependent material relations. Having reached critical masses, these fictive waste ecologies resemble in some measure the effects of Timothy Morton’s hyperobjects or “things massively distributed across time and space relative to humans” (*Hyperobjects* 1). Couched firmly within the language of object-oriented ontology, Morton’s theory of hyperobjects critiques the hierarchy of material relations in which humans are still privileged over nonhumans. *Hyperobjects* delineates a humbling account of humans’ inability to fully grasp entities that are not the sum of its signs and which exist (to us) on incomprehensible scales of time and space. Hyperobjects are not a modern phenomenon; the fact that hyperobjects like plutonium, which remains radioactive for over twenty-four thousand years (*Hyperobjects* 94), exist on massive scales of time means that many of the hyperobjects that we have begun to notice existed across historical eras. Morton published an article briefly detailing some of the Victorian hyperobjects—i.e., “geological time, capital, industry, evolution, cities, the unconscious, electromagnetism, climate phenomena such as El Niño”—that we still experience today (“Victorian Hyperobjects” 489). In spite of our perceptual limitations,

Morton urges us to consider the “intimacy” between coexisting human and nonhuman entities (*Hyperobjects* 108).

There have been mixed critical responses to Morton’s work as a contribution to ecocritical theory. In a recent review of *Hyperobjects*, Ursula K. Heise acknowledges the book’s theorization of the issues of scale latent in ecocriticism’s discussions of the Anthropocene, deep time, and so forth. However, Heise takes issue with the structure of Morton’s arguments—particularly his uncertain uses of quantum and relativity theory, as well as how his “strawman environmentalism” misconstrues the state of the field (Heise 461). In spite of these limitations, Morton’s work is useful as a tool of literary analysis, specifically in this instance because the hyperobjects theorization addresses the dilations of scale that proliferate in *Our Mutual Friend*. The present analysis is therefore less concerned with suggesting the presence of hyperobjects in *Our Mutual Friend*. Instead, I wish to suggest that some of the broader aims of Morton’s theory are allied to and inform my discussions of Dickensian waste ecologies.

For Morton, capitalism asserts a myth of Nature as a mass of nonspecific material that exists to be turned into capital and ultimately ends up as waste. According to Morton, this nonspecific “stuff” or “lump” is best described by Heidegger’s “*Bestand* (standing reserve)” (*Hyperobjects* 113). A convenient and anthropocentric “stockpiling” (*Hyperobjects* 113), this tidy assignation of Nature and waste as the before and after of capital gives rise to the notion that Nature is somehow separate from humans or “over there”—the *world* of Nature, in other words, denies how messily and inextricably enmeshed we are with things. The world of *Our Mutual Friend* is suggestive of this idea of *Bestand*. The dust-heaps are situated on private property, sifted and sorted out of the public eye until they are sold and carted off to some unspecified “elsewhere.” The river occupies its own distinct space with the embankment of the Thames, and those waterside characters who muddy the boundaries between city and river are treated as social miscreants subject to such tokens of suspicion as the Inspector’s “distrustful nod of recognition upon Gaffer, plainly importing, ‘Ah! we know all about *you*, and you’ll overdo it some day’” (Dickens 24). Yet, the novel undermines the idea of *Bestand* in spite of itself. Dust billows throughout the city despite attempts to gather and sort it. The

river ebbs and floods, overflows with waste, and clings persistently to those who encounter it such as Lizzie Hexam, who “can’t get away from it” (228). These two waste ecologies cannot be so easily contained and insistently force their presence onto humans.

Like hyperobjects, the waste of *Our Mutual Friend* is imagined as a powerful destructuring force. The dust ecology upends our notions of garbage; dust can be used to fertilize fields, conceal treasure, turn a profit, choke and irritate pedestrians, sever family ties, blackmail one’s employer, or do nothing at all. The Harmon dust-heaps carry the potential to alter the socioeconomic standings of those humans entangled with it—can make the Boffins rich, or make the Boffins poor and Wegg rich—revealing the contingency and mutability of our social and economic designations. The Thames ecology, on the other hand, gives the lie to all of the human constructions that take for granted a material and stable existence as living bodies. The biosphere of which humans are a part includes death, decomposition, the transformation from living body to nonliving materials. The characters that encounter this waste ecology are changed, sometimes irrevocably—Gaffer Hexam goes from bird of prey to the prey itself, John Harmon buries his identity “many fathoms deep”, Bradley Headstone glimpses the self-destructive root of his violent desires, Eugene Wrayburn loses his languor and vanity, and even Riderhood cuts a sympathetic figure when on the verge of death after being run down in his boat by a steamer.

What Morton says is gained in the loss of a given world is *intimacy*—or those “entities that coexist with us [and] obtrude on our awareness with greater and greater urgency” (*Hyperobjects* 108). We return full circle, then, to Chen’s view of animacy’s having “the capacity to rewrite the conditions of intimacy, engendering different communalisms and revising biopolitical spheres” (3); the waste ecologies of *Our Mutual Friend* foreground a communalism of radical, intimate material relations. And while such a communalism may be anathema to the Victorian ethos of systematic order, classification, even sanitation, the novel nonetheless offers us a fleeting glance of what such intimacies look like.

As communities of intimate material relations, the waste ecologies appear to the characters as sites of continual, if futile, negotiation; Gaffer, Riderhood, Venus, Wegg, and Lizzie are only some of the many characters who attempt to negotiate the terms by which they are circulated or even, as in Wegg's case, "dispersed," scattered, and rendered uncollectable (82). Just as Venus's collections of bones and articulations of skeletons provoke polemic debate, *Our Mutual Friend* foregrounds the mesh of material relations into which characters are woven, whether or not those relations take the forms of resistance and negotiation.

Of all of these characters, Venus is a unique intermediary associated with both of the novel's waste ecologies. As a collector of "[b]ones, warios" (81), Venus's work is devoted to collecting, sorting, and repurposing human and animal bones, among other things. In this capacity, he has had dealings with both the Harmon dust-heaps and the Thames. As he explains to Wegg, Venus was frequently sought out by Harmon Sr. to appraise "the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust" (84). Venus's trade also took him to the riverside, where, hoping to purchase parrots "to buy for stuffing" and "a nice pair of rattlesnakes, to articulate for a Museum" (500), he first meets and falls in love with Pleasant Riderhood. Venus is perhaps the novel's most extreme example of stoic repurposing because he has no problems with considering subject and object as interchangeable categories. He tells Wegg: "if you was brought here loose in a bag to be articulated, I'd name your smallest bones blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I'd sort 'em all, and sort your wertebrae, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you" (83). Venus accepts at once individual human body parts as metonyms for the human subject, and that those same body parts have a thing-like potential to be deployed in all manner of ways beyond that subject's understanding or control. He alone is able to regard all living things in a "bony light" (84), or as equal to nonliving things.

For the majority of the novel, Venus acts as an agent of the novel's two waste ecologies, dealing evenly between the living and the nonliving. Like the dust-heaps and the Thames, he manually reorders (i.e., in articulating skeletons) and redistributes (i.e., selling at his shop) human and animal bones. This position, however, does not last, and even Venus is



subject to a manner of reform. Thanks to the mediations of Boffin and John Harmon, Pleasant Riderhood—who previously refused Venus from not wanting “to regard [her]self, not yet to be regarded, in that bony light”—is persuaded to marry him on the condition that he “confine[s] [him]self to the articulation of men, children, and the lower animals” (84, 782). Pleasant, in other words, is the only character besides Wegg who takes steps to safeguard her physical identity from absorption into a waste ecology. Accepting these terms, Venus ends his partnership with Wegg. Venus also strictly censors the language he hears used in connection with Pleasant; he objects to Wegg referring to Pleasant as “the old party,” and to their wedding “in the form of a Fight,” each time demanding that Wegg rephrase his remarks (782).

Venus embodies Chen’s and Morton’s notions of the intimacy of material relations. The “bony light” with which he regards everything and everyone about him is the view of intimacy—of the nearness of humans to things, of the material relations in which we are enmeshed. Admiring a stuffed bird that he has just sold to a customer, he says: “There’s animation! On a twig, making up his mind to hop! Take care of him; he’s a lovely specimen” (81). Venus delights in the animacy of things on either side of the life/death binary, always regarding the agential quality of matter without particularly noticing or caring for its liveness. However, Venus curtails this intimacy in order to persuade Pleasant Riderhood to marry him—exchanges a more radical form of intimacy for a conventional one. The strict censorship that Venus exercises upon any discourse relating to Pleasant is therefore appropriate, corresponding to the self-censorship that he exercises on his own perspective.

## 1.5

There is something particularly *unsystematic* about the waste of *Our Mutual Friend*. Contrary to the consistency and productive potential implicit in an ordered system, ecologies of waste scatter and transform the discarded remnants of production. The novel’s waste does not assert a particular order so much as a disruptive organicism, and one that extends out to material categories such as living and nonliving. Waste continually ebbs and flows beyond human control: dust continues to buffet about the streets of London despite constant efforts to sweep and sort, human body parts become

interchangeable with objects for trade,<sup>24</sup> and the strong currents of the Thames are an ever-present danger to those who scavenge along its shores. Indeed, characters in the novel who make their living scavenging from waste ecologies do not clean, sanitize, or reform waste-ridden spaces with any success; some characters like Gaffer Hexam and Mr. Venus are so embroiled within cycles of waste that they cannot live beyond them.

What, then, do we do with those parts of the novel overtly devoted to recycling—particularly those characters undertaking acts of repurposing within, near, or because of either of the two waste ecologies? Mr. and Mrs. Boffin’s initial acts upon inheriting the dust-heaps centre on “doing what’s right by our fortune” (99) and repurposing the Harmon wealth to serve, rather than to injure, others; the “Fashionable Society” (99) that Mrs. Boffin desires is to be surrounded by the company of her beneficiaries, Bella Wilfer, Sloppy, and John Harmon. The scheme to reform Bella’s “mercenary wretch[edness]” (319) comes of the Boffins’ and John Harmon’s attempts to repurpose Harmon Sr.’s will, transforming it from one that bound the son to a wealthy but unhappy marriage to one that grants the son both wealth and affection. Similarly caught up in acts of repurposing are Harmon Sr. (the recyclable dust-heaps), Wegg (who clumsily attempts to repurpose literature when he “drop[s] into poetry” (51), in addition to repurposing another of Harmon Sr.’s wills), George Radfoot (who attempts to repurpose John Harmon’s identity), and Riderhood (who repurposes Gaffer’s “luck,” Betty Higden’s fears, and Bradley Headstone’s disguise). If what these characters practice can be termed recycling at all, it is a recycling out of bounds—an omnivorous willingness to repurpose everything from scrap paper, debris, and bottled wills, to bones, bodies, and legal identities. Such patterns of behaviour are the mechanical responses to the waste ecologies, and they speak to the profound breakdown of any categorical divides amongst a field of intimate, material relations. Living in a waste ecology, these characters are so ingrained in their habits of repurposing that, like the river, they are also subject to confusing the boundaries between living and nonliving, product and waste, subject and object.

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<sup>24</sup> Venus almost loses some of his collectible teeth when it mixes in with the change that he has just given to a customer.

Once we as readers look past the ‘world’ of waste as the before-and-after of commodity culture, the novel is revealed for the rich intimacy of material relations that it represents. Although some characters—especially the poorer and labouring-class characters—practice recycling, these practices are only a small fragment of how waste (in its movement, activity, and latent animacy) is expressed within the novel. As we witness characters’ interactions with waste, Dickens also opens readers up to waste’s presence and effects at the societal level, at the urban level. Recycling is not the issue at the heart of waste in the novel; recycling is simply how humans process, adapt to, and vainly attempt to enact animacy within an ecology of waste that seems increasingly to have a trajectory of its own.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Values, in Decay: *Bleak House* and Accumulating Waste Ecologies

*Bleak House* rivets its focus on London's accumulation of a dense surplus of material from its opening paragraph, and, throughout its narration of a legal suit that spans generations and distant family members, it maintains this focus on the intimidations of material excess. There is "[a]s much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth" (13). Polluting smoke is the chief weather of this area, "lowering down from chimneypots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes" (13). The streets swarm with mud-splattered pedestrians, "losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke)" (13). The crowds leave in their wake "new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest" (13). This ceaseless friction between people, animals, fog, and dirt is ever productive of new material. Their involuntary physical contact exacerbates the material density of the urban landscape.

The link between mud and compound interest is not incidental. This ambivalent image joins the most valueless matter to an open-ended stream of abstract wealth. While compound interest typically increases value by accumulation, Dickens uses the concept to complete an image of diminishing value by accumulation. Mud accumulating at compound interest is the central ironic metaphor for the relentless aggregation of waste in *Bleak House*. Outside of a financial context, compound interest is geometric growth that in this case corrodes value instead of increasing it. Mud's unbounded growth in an urban space is an ecological productivity that upends human cultural aesthetics and definitions of value. The opening of *Bleak House* signals the novel's deeper concern with ecologies

and rampant accumulation that over long intervals actively disrupt and decay both the accumulation and often the accumulator.<sup>25</sup>

Pushing material into excess, accumulation confuses the distinctions between established hierarchies and categories—subject and object, living and nonliving, commodity and waste—and displaces their signification. The dogs are “undistinguishable in the mire” and the “Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers” (13). Nothing, moreover, escapes the weight of this excess material. The very atmosphere is cumulative to an overwhelming degree; there is “Fog everywhere,” up and down the river, aboard ships “in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners,” and along bridges forming “a nether sky of fog” (13). At the centre of this crowded, ever-accumulating, material excess are three peculiar institutions: the Court of Chancery, Krook’s rag-and-bottle shop, and Tom-all-Alone’s. The novel’s characters regard these institutions as ordered and controlled systems; the Court of Chancery was designed to systematize disputes of equity, Krook’s to reintegrate waste commodities into an economic system, and Tom-all-Alone’s to methodically dispose of and to fairly designate properties in Chancery. All three, however, fulfill precisely the reverse of these roles. These institutions represent, if anything, the failure of systematization.

Victorian literary studies have often noticed the accelerated materiality that pervades *Bleak House*. Daniel Tyler describes Dickens’s work as a “remarkable investment in and studied depiction of a minutely realised material culture” (7). Dickens’s microscopic attention to Victorian material culture, as well as to the material situatedness of people, places, and things, has led scholars to examine *Bleak House*’s many papers, letters, and

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<sup>25</sup> Emily Steinlight notes a similarly ironic vocabulary of accumulation in Dickens’s portrayal of the wealthy guests assembled at Chesney Wold, which draws upon the unexpected term “supernumeraries” (Dickens 191): “In a period obsessed with the health of the social body as a whole, Dickens’s fiction speaks to one of the greatest perplexities of the century’s bioeconomic discourse of population: the virtually unthinkable problem suggested by the term *supernumeraries*, or the paradox of a total in excess of the total . . . the cynicism implied in the narrator’s use of this term relies in part on the potential for statistical evaluation to produce its own exception” (229–230). In referencing both compound interest and supernumeraries, Dickens draws upon economics and statistics, two subsets of the broader policy-making that he consistently critiques throughout the novel.

documents, which in the novel are notable more for their volume than for their written contents. A number of scholars have revisited J. Hillis Miller's famous remark that *Bleak House* is "a document about the interpretation of documents" (179), suggesting instead that the novel is less about interpreting documents than about "the materiality of documents and the interpretation of that materiality" (Hack 38). Additionally, scholars have shown keen interest in *Bleak House*'s representations of waste, from Robert E. Lougy's discussion of the liminality of filth, and Patrick Chappell's readings of the fluctuating value of rubbish, to Nasser Mufti's analysis of nationalized mud. This chapter is indebted to both lines of inquiry, and to some extent unites the two in pursuing an analysis of the material situatedness of human endeavours, human systems of meaning, and human bodies as they come to form waste. At the same time, this chapter differs in joining the materiality of documents and writing to waste, as well as its attention to less literal forms of waste. The three readings I offer combine the methods of new materialism, ecocriticism, and waste studies. My particular interest lies in the tension that develops between systematic and ecological structures in *Bleak House*—a tension that becomes clear in the novel's three loci of accumulating waste: the Court of Chancery, Krook's rag-and-bottle shop, and Tom-all-Alone's.

The scale at which this chapter enacts its close readings dilates between large- and small-scale waste, following another important development in Victorian literary criticism—an increasing interest in scalar methodologies. Emily Steinlight suggests that "scalar thinking" spans "new applications of world systems theory to experiments in distant reading to literary histories situated in deep time" (15). Steinlight's contribution to this shift is to forgo the Dickensian city's celebration of individual subjectivity, reading instead for that city's decided inattention to the individual and its bland privileging of anonymous, heterogenous masses. For instance, while critics have previously read *Bleak House* as championing nineteenth-century sanitation reform and as celebrating the preservation of the individual from harm, Steinlight opts instead to focus on the novel's emphasis on "the power of epidemic to belie apparent distinctions between individual and mass and among classed bodies and spaces" (111). This chapter follows Steinlight's interest in the larger structural formations latent in *Bleak House*, without dispensing entirely with examples from the text that may appear to showcase the individual human

subject. To an extent, I apply scalar methods in the previous chapter, which is oriented to the materiality of the Thames and piles of waste rather than to the human economies of recycling built around them. This chapter, however, pursues the ways in which scale itself can be used to reconstruct human relations and boundaries within a novel.

Disintegrating distinctions between humans and waste are at the heart of this novel's provocative dissolution of a typical hierarchy of material relations. Scale is an important concept in *Bleak House*—particularly the threat that large-scale structures pose to the liberal subject. That threat is precisely Dickens's concern in presenting three loci of accumulated material which, in their vast scale, devalue individuation. This is not to suggest that there is no place for reading for individuals in the novel; individual characters are often the means by which the larger threat to the individual is presented. However, by turning to a more dynamic, scalar methodology, and in exercising some caution against taking the value of the liberal individual for granted, we may understand more fully those structural and stylistic drives of *Bleak House* that are bound to the concept of accumulation.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, I examined how human characters engage with waste by becoming waste—or by becoming enmeshed in a web of material relations wherein waste is catching, in a sense. In *Bleak House*, human endeavours, structures of meaning, and even bodies approach waste in a cycle of accumulation, negotiation, and devaluation. The present chapter, then, addresses a different set of material waste relations from those seen in Chapter 1. While the previous chapter moves between two notable waste ecologies that express an obscure influence across *Our Mutual Friend*, this chapter begins with one primary waste ecology—the Court of Chancery—that gives rise to two subsidiary waste ecologies—Krook's rag-and-bottle shop and Tom-all-Alone's. The Court of Chancery sits at the converging point of the novel's conflicted systems of meaning; each turns upon Chancery in one way or another. As Hillis Miller observes, “there is at the center of *Bleak House* a tension between belief in some extra-human source of value, a stable center outside the shadows of the human game, and on the other hand the shade of a suspicion that there may be no such center, that all systems of interpretation may be fictions” (197). This chapter explores the processes and associations that entangle those conflicted systems of meaning into a larger waste ecology. I follow the Court of Chancery from its

proceedings to Krook's rag-and-bottle shop, and then on to Tom-all-Alone's, tracing the strained material relations that surround them. To do so, as well as to appreciate the full complexity of material that grows exponentially in quantity, my analysis includes both Krook's rag-and-bottle shop and Tom-all-Alone's, and the strained material relations that surround them.

Taking each of these waste ecologies in turn, this chapter examines the ways in which the Court of Chancery, Krook's rag-and-bottle shop, and Tom-all-Alone's all rehearse cyclical patterns of accumulation that foster decay and operate as what this dissertation has been calling waste ecologies. As waste ecologies they accumulate and reorient everything—papers, clothing, animals, humans, even language—towards decay. I consider that these forms of material growth through accumulation has an ecological structure in this novel; as the useless and wasteful hoards of the novel grow, that growth appears more organic than numeric in kind. As such, accumulation is imbued with an unacknowledged power that interferes with the very “human game” that tries to support systems of interpretation. Though the characters of the novel often search for meaning and recuperation within these sites of accumulation, these negotiations with waste inevitably fail. In this sense, *Bleak House* stages the impossibility for humans to find anything like meaning, purpose, or agency next to these critical masses of waste.

## 2.1

*Bleak House* dramatizes the Court of Chancery's elusive structural organization through the ubiquitous fog of London. The weather surrounding Lincoln's Inn Hall, where the Court is located, reflects excessive accumulation through atmospheric density: “[t]he raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest” by Temple Bar and Lincoln's Inn, and the Court itself sits “at the very heart of the fog” (14). On the one hand, fog is an elusive substance representing the “groping and floundering condition” of the inefficient and perennially deferred administrative work in Chancery (14). The pernicious influence of Chancery is reflected in fog's vaporous and unstructured physical properties. On the other hand, the novel invests fog with a distinct material presence: it “hang[s] heavy . . . as if it would never get out”; “the attendant



wigs” appear to onlookers as if they were trapped in position, “all stuck in a fog-bank!” (15). Even beyond Lincoln’s Inn, fog is invested with material properties. There is:

Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. (13)

Dickens compares fog to various physical entities, alternating between the large and the small. Fog bears the physical qualities of a large body of water; it “flows,” and “rolls.” It is also localized to the body of a living creature, found “creeping,” “lying,” “hovering,” “drooping,” and “pinching.” At times fog grows smaller still, congesting throats and pipes. Fog in other words accrues material characteristics, emulating an accumulation of its own.

Dickens’s fog has accumulated a critical canon as well. Hillis Miller, pointing to its pervasive tendrils stretching from fashionable to impoverished districts, observes that fog suggests “the interconnectedness of people in all levels of society” (180). This reading of the fog parallels Richard Menke’s interest in telegraphy as a mediating fantasy in Dickens’s work. Menke draws upon revealing notes that Dickens jotted in preparation for a different work of fiction. Dickens’s directions to himself read as a more dynamic and linear version of the unfurling beginning of *Bleak House*: “Open the story by bringing two strongly contrasted places and strongly contrasted sets of people, into the connexion necessary for the story, by means of an electric message. Describe the message—*be* the message—flashing along through space” (Dickens qtd. by Menke, *Telegraphic Realism* 90). The first two chapters of *Bleak House* seem to realize this “connexion” running between differences in a more gradual and passive juxtaposition. The reader’s attention

connects the worn suitors of Chancery with the wealthy party at Chesney Wold. The more direct parallel in the novel's opening, however, lies in the fog and the connections that it makes as whole across social, material, and legal categories. Menke suggests that the telegraphic offered Victorian realist authors a narrative influence "associated with neutral, abstract information" (*Telegraphic Realism* 89). These networks also offered authors like Dickens a means to imagine social ties through "a wider sense of new contiguities and expanding interconnection" (94). In the famous opening passage of *Bleak House*, these interconnections cross social and spatial distances—become thoughtless, ominous, and disconcerting. The neutrality and abstraction of an information network reappears in the senseless, colourless mediation of a meteorological event. That readers experience the fog's ubiquity, much as they might experience the telegraphic message's direct movement, suggests our own entanglement with the fog's objective prospect. If, as Menke remarks, "the telegraph signifies electric information that lacks a material body, and that seems identifiable with no body in particular" (*Telegraphic Realism* 90), the fog offers a less optimistic alternative. Its bodiless immateriality decentres the individual within a populace, a space, an environment. The fog ushers in an ecology that obscures clear distinctions and categories. No longer linear, the fog suggests an ecological unity, binding the city into an interrelated environment.

Recently, Jesse Oak Taylor has reaffirmed this understanding of Dickens's fog as an urban membrane:

Dickens presents a city of smoke and fog, enveloped in its own exhalations. . . . Rather than a closed system nested within an environment, the novel presents a tangled thicket of interrelated assemblages and multitiered systems at once legal, bodily, and economic, with all of the systems open to and affected by the others. (33)

Taylor points to the truth lying behind the euphemistic use of the term “fog.” London’s air was filled with atmospheric pollution. It is atmospheric pollution that “irritat[es] the eyes and throats” (*Our Mutual Friend* 144) of Dickens’s Londoners and that flows through the city, mirroring the polluted Thames discussed in the previous chapter. When Esther first arrives in London, she immediately recognizes the disastrously polluted quality of the air. She mistakes the fog for smoke from “a great fire” (42). Esther’s comment reveals her recognition that the London fog is waste, a pollutant that does not belong. As well, this recognition betrays her as a stranger to the city, one outside of the social mesh of the “fog” and who does not belong. Chase and Levenson express fog’s urban ubiquity most succinctly when they observe that the “descent of gloom blinds the city into unity” (207). Guppy is proof that this blindness may be attributable to the polluted nature of the atmosphere itself. He corrects Esther’s observation, assuring her that pollution, or “fog,” is “a London particular” (42). Londoners’ sense of blind unity, their metropolitan connection across class, is an identity borrowed from waste. If fog emulates the traits of London, it is because these characteristics are endlessly bound into and represented by waste. This euphemistic fog becomes emblematic of London life, and denying its character as waste becomes characteristic of London living. This negotiation with waste, which borrows an agency or identity from waste’s rampant accumulation, repeats in a variety of forms throughout this chapter. The irritation in the pensioner’s throat signals the destructive outcome of such temporary bargains.

This cumulative quality is what aligns fog to the Court at Lincoln’s Inn. Like the many documents in Chancery that are more important for their physical quantity than for what their contents signify, fog’s material presence competes with its own metaphorical signification. Fog suggests the geographically vast boundaries of Chancery-based influence, the court’s oppressively opaque atmosphere, and its intangible consequence. As D. A. Miller suggests, “what Chancery produces, or threatens to produce, is an organization of power that, ceasing entirely to be a *topic*, has become topography itself: a system of control that can be all-encompassing because it cannot be encompassed in turn” (61). The power of Chancery exceeds the systemic bounds in which it was initially designed. This organizational topography, with its elusive disorganization, resembles an ecology in its cyclical growth. The only form of progress that the Court recognizes

consists of repetitive speeches, paper copies, and meaningless formalities, the only function of which is to contribute to its institutional growth. As a vehicle for reimagining the Court as urban topography, then, fog might reasonably be the event horizon by which we measure the material influence of this urban waste ecology.

Rather like its parallel institution, Krook's rag-and-bottle shop, the Court of Chancery amasses many things, and everything within this unceasing accumulation decays and becomes waste. In its attempt to prolong the bureaucratic mechanisms by which its members profit, the Court amasses props, documents, and people under the semblance of due legal process, and combines a strong reluctance to relinquish with a rapacious desire to involve and gather. In its first description, the Court is characterized not by its juridical or administrative functions, but by its additive propensities—its tendency to accrue in material weight:

This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance . . . (14-15)

These are seizures that the Court of Chancery is legally responsible for, but they are also expressed as seizures in the sense of ownership and the possession of collected items. Dickens's language here links accumulation with capture. The Court "has"—retains ownership of—"its decaying houses," "its blighted lands," and "its worn-out lunatic" (emphases added). However, a ward of the state and a suitor are two legally separate entities endowed with a wide margin of difference in legal agency; yet, the power of the Court is such that it can reduce a suitor to the condition of a ward in its custody or a desperate and bankrupted paramour (the other, tongue-in-cheek meaning of "suitor"). Moreover, there is a fatal ambiguity present in this quotation's use of "with." The implication of the Court's ownership of a "ruined suitor, *with* his slipshod heels and threadbare dress" allows for the possibility of yet another doubled reading. The Court may have a suitor who wears "slipshod heels and threadbare dress" or may have a suitor *along with* "his slipshod heels and threadbare dress." In the midst of the Court's rampant

material accumulation, characters gradually approach emblems, becoming the more significant for their material qualities. Accumulation in Chancery functions by engaging such material qualities. Miss Flite, Richard, and others before them are transformed into tropes of the proceedings, the token “worn-out lunatic” and “ruined suitor.” Speeches and reports are infused with physical characteristics, with members of the bar “tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities,” and “running their goat-hair and horse-hair warded heads against walls of words” (14). The Lord High Chancellor is similarly enmeshed in swaths of material, sitting “with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains” (14).

In Chancery, *Bleak House* develops a vision of accrued materials so excessive that they can barely sustain their signification, their legibility. The Court’s legal documents and proceedings continue to baffle and remain incomprehensible because their larger meaning lies in the fact of their multitudes. When Esther first attends court while the Jarndyce and Jarndyce cause is on, she struggles to comprehend the proceedings:

there was a buzz, and a laugh, and a general withdrawal of the bystanders, and a bringing in of great heaps, and piles, and bags and bags-full of papers.

I think it came on ‘for further directions,’ – about some bill of costs, to the best of my understanding, which was confused enough. But I counted twenty-three gentlemen in wigs, who said they were ‘in it;’ . . . and some of them jocosely proposed to read huge volumes of affidavits, and there was more buzzing and laughing . . . . After an hour or so of this, and a good many speeches being begun and cut short, it was ‘referred back for the present,’ as Mr Kenge said, and the papers were bundled up again, before the clerks had finished bringing them in. (397)

Bewildered by this incomprehensible multitude and accumulation, the one impression that Esther can grasp is the quantity of what she sees—i.e., “great heaps, and piles, and bags and bags-full of papers,” “twenty-three gentlemen in wigs,” and “huge volumes of affidavits.” The physical quantity of the papers exceeds even the stultified duration of the proceedings; the documents are too numerous to be brought in within the span of the hearing. The passage presents the Jarndyce and Jarndyce proceedings as a catalogue—

itemized lists being something of a signature move in Dickens's literary style, as Daniel Tyler and others have noted. The scene lists the multitudes of objects, persons, and activity in this space as an inventory of stock, but without any explanation of the organizing logic of the items gathered therein. This cataloguing emphasizes numbers and context-less quantity, barring us from the central concerns and meaning of the proceedings much as Esther is. Indeed, Esther scarcely comprehends the "further directions" or the arbitrary costs that lie at the centre of these proceedings, but she immediately counts the "twenty-three gentlemen in wigs." Being "in it" also has a double meaning: on the one hand, the barristers are involved in the suit; on the other hand, these men are yet another item added to the suit's collection. The parting image of the only partially-delivered papers, never considered in their totality, completes the suggestion that what matters here is their overwhelming numbers and not anyone's access to them as legible texts. When the Court and its innumerable cases are read for their enactment of accumulation, the baffling machinations of Chancery become clearer. Under such a principle, what began as an expression of systematized sovereign power has evolved into ungovernable, unrelenting material excess.

That these various material signifiers are ultimately empty of meaning betrays the essential vapidness of the Chancery system itself. When John Jarndyce tries to describe what the suit is about, for instance, one sees a linguistic example of the strain that the Chancery system places on meaning:

It's about a Will, and the trusts under a Will – or it was, once.  
It's about nothing but Costs, now. We are always appearing,  
and disappearing, and swearing, and interrogating, and filing,  
and cross-filing, and arguing, and sealing, and motioning, and  
referring, and reporting, and revolving about the Lord  
Chancellor and all his satellites, and equitably waltzing  
ourselves off to dusty death, about Costs. That's the great  
question. All the rest, by some extraordinary means, has  
melted away. (118)

As Jarndyce explains, the enactment of these legal procedures has supplanted the administration of the will and its trusts as the aim of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. In the suit's rapacious productivity, the legal motions—represented by ample and meticulous copies—blend together into one incomprehensible mass of documentation. The "extraordinary means" by which this legal administration has become opaque,

unknowable, is that, rather than being figuratively material to the case, the various motions of Jarndyce and Jarndyce are material to the case only in a literal sense—they comprise so much material gathered in the name of this one cause. Meanwhile, “All the rest”—referring to any other distinction, value, or signification these papers might have had—“has melted away.” Jarndyce’s catalogue of verbs is not simply conventional to Dickens’s stylized prose; the list of ambiguous verbs echoes the circuitous path by which Chancery suitors are bewildered. We might consider a contrasting example to this Dickensian list in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), which assigns to Scrooge the verbs “squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching” (23). When we compare this list of verbs to Jarndyce’s “appearing,” “disappearing,” “swearing,” “interrogating,” “filing,” “cross-filing,” “arguing,” “sealing,” “motioning,” “referring,” “reporting,” “revolving,” and “waltzing,” the grammatical reasons for the obscured meaning of Chancery documents become clear. The *Christmas Carol* verbs all share a single subject, Scrooge, and their significance builds upon this basis; the Jarndyce verbs reference a vague array of subjects, including, perhaps, witnesses, lawyers, clerks, judges, documents, and evidence. The doubled meanings of the verbs (literal and legal), combined with the length of the list and the number of subjects, confuse the significance of the whole. The signification of the Chancery papers are so confused and displaced that Jarndyce must invent a vocabulary to describe the process: “Wiglomeration,” or the “vastly ceremonious, wordy, unsatisfactory, and expensive” legal proceedings (121). In other words, the text enacts the grammatical accumulation that negates meaning.<sup>26</sup> If Jarndyce’s criticism is that the verbs are effectively meaningless, that criticism is staged by Dickens’s own syntax.

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<sup>26</sup> Steinlight suggests a reading in which Dickens’s signature style finds a new significance within *Bleak House*. Where I point to accumulated language that diminishes each individual word’s signification, Steinlight observes the superficial development of the novel’s nameless supernumerary characters: “In *Bleak House*, however (as is so often the case in Dickens’s writing), the implicit verbal irony of the narrator’s description produces the further irony of an unlikely narrative truth. For all its strident populism, the novel generates larger numbers than its own domestic and political economies can accommodate” (*Populating the Novel* 228).

When Jarndyce tries to convey to Esther the extreme redundancy that defines the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit, what he imparts is the uselessness of resisting the non-linear and self-replicating structure of the Chancery waste ecology. He explains:

In the question how the trusts under that Will are to be administered . . . the Will itself is made a dead letter.<sup>27</sup> All through the deplorable cause, everything that everybody in it, except one man, knows already, is referred to that only one man who don't know it, to find out – all through the deplorable cause, everybody must have copies, over and over again, of everything that has accumulated about it in the way of cartloads of papers (or must pay for them without having them, which is the usual course, for nobody wants them); . . . And thus, through years and years, and lives and lives, everything goes on, constantly beginning over and over again, and nothing ever ends. And we can't get out of the suit on any terms, for we are made parties to it, and *must* be parties to it, whether we like it or not. (118-119)

In Chancery, waste reproduces excessively; the “copies, over and over again” and cyclical procedures “constantly beginning over and over again” result in “cartloads” of so much waste paper, “for nobody wants them.” The Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit “constantly begin[s] over and over again,” lacks a clear termination or direction, and eventually lacks the funds to reach a full resolution in court. That cyclical structure is also infectious. Jarndyce’s own speech takes on some of the redundancy that characterizes the processes he describes, with its repetitions and the syntax that seems endless (“over and over again,” “years and years,” “lives and lives,” “parties to it . . . parties to it”). Indeed, Jarndyce’s familiarity with these terms and expressions suggests either that he was once drawn in by these bewildering legal machinations, or is subtly influenced by it in spite of his determined refusal to seek signification in Chancery. Jarndyce’s invented vocabulary,

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<sup>27</sup> The cause, as we see, is so productive of waste paper that even the central document around which the entire case revolves “is made a dead letter.” Resulting typically from the illegibility of written directions, the dead letter is a fitting emblem for Jarndyce and Jarndyce, a suit built upon the ambiguity of its original will’s written directions. Dead letters stymie circulation and steadily accumulate in piles of paper whose signification is indefinitely deferred. Dead letters, however, may also result from the absence of a clear end point or destination, as well as from insufficient funds to cover the cost of postage.



his repetitive attempts at explanation, and his multi-referential imagery all suggest language's fundamental inability to encompass the expansive and unspecific nature of a suit that beggars significance, and of a growing waste ecology that absorbs and consequently diminishes the value of individual human endeavour.

The self-replication and patterns of decay that govern the Court of Chancery form an ecology of waste. The structure of Dickens's Chancery is not so neatly contained or regulated as that of a system; its apparent order and regularity is a blind for a chaos of rampant accumulation, of emptied signification, and of growth by decay. A Chancery suit does not develop along a linear progression; what the Jarndyce and Jarndyce example shows is that a suit will repeat certain cycles of legal proceedings, increasing its expenditure or its rate of wasting resources until either the resources have been fully absorbed into costs or the suitor dies and becomes the final, bodily addition to the accumulated waste. Whatever the form of accumulation in Chancery, that which is accumulated is driven toward decay. Dickens's lavish legal metonyms alert us to the objecthood encroaching upon human characters entangled in Chancery. The Jarndyce suitors are the bearers of a "scarecrow of a suit"—the tattered clothing that remains after the wasted body beneath it disappears (16); "the maces, bags, and purses" are the metonyms by which Dickens refers to officers of the State (17); Queen's Counsel barristers are referred to by their attire, including "Mr Blowers the eminent silk gown" (17). These metonyms are assigned carefully; while suitors waste away until nothing is left of them but the tattered remains of their clothing, those individuals who can survive or thrive within the system of the Court become interchangeable with those articles that they wear or use. In either case, the Court's material presence signifies neither the authority of the state, nor the interests of the citizen, but rather an accumulating materiality for its own sake. If Krook devalues the goods of his shop to the point of destroying their economic significance, the Court of Chancery destroys all signification beyond the material itself. Gordon Bigelow points out that the physical routinely overwhelms the semiotic in *Bleak House* when he describes the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit as "a pure materiality of writing, an infinite semiotics, a language that does not signify, but only increases itself" (88). This emptiness of meaning is why the Chancery system is as heedless of the waste and ruin brought upon its suitors as Krook is of the

disorder and disrepair of his wares. The Court operates on the rehearsal of the forms and motions, on the accrual of papers and suitors, because it supplements, even replaces, judiciary substance with the accumulation of material substance. Import, relevance, and significance are papered over.

We see an extension of this displaced meaning in Snagsby's law-stationer's business, which deals specifically with the reproduction of legal documents, and which has enough business to warrant sending surplus work out regularly to independent law-writers such as Nemo. Snagsby's profession is described not by the naming of the work itself, but rather through the many objects accessory to copying work:

. . . Mr. Snagsby has dealt in all sorts of blank forms of legal process; in skins and rolls of parchment; in paper—foolscap, brief, draft, brown, white, whitey-brown, and blotting; in stamps; in office-quills, pens, ink, India-rubber, pounce, pins, pencils, sealing-wax, and wafers; in red tape and green ferret; in pocket-books, almanacs, diaries, and law lists; in string boxes, rulers, inkstands—glass and leaden—pen-knives, scissors, bodkins, and other small office-cutlery; in short, in articles too numerous to mention . . . (154)

That we are thrown headlong into the minutiae of the material realities of undertaking such work suggests that material propagation begets more material propagation. Copying work not only produces more paper copies, but also necessitates the production of seven varieties of paper, writing tools and accessories, and all manner of “small office-cutlery.” Furthermore, the variety of stationary products suggests the variety of formats that copied documents require. The only indication of these copies' existence, moreover, lies in their material properties—which are facilitated by these accessories—and not in the signification of the copied text. The material, in other words, stands in for semantic possibility here.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Victorian literary scholars have been keenly alert to the narrative significance of waste paper. Richard Menke's recent article, “*New Grub Street's* Ecologies of Paper,” implies the fascinating semantic possibility of waste-paper, enabled by a shift in the late-nineteenth century from rag-paper production to wood-pulp paper. Menke argues that the latter mode of production, which is cheaper and less durable, imbues the subject of Gissing's novel (the waning medium of the luxury triple-decker novel) with ironic significance. In the context of this dissertation, however, Menke's work further presents an intriguing

Snagsby's law stationer's shop is therefore a satellite waste ecology that grows out of the Chancery waste ecology. Ambiguous papers (in the form of legal copies) sustain an ecology of stationary that similarly has no other meaning beyond their material presence in the novel. As we will see in Krook's shop, ambiguous papers appear throughout the novel. Their crisis, however, lies in Chancery. Copying and copied-texts bear material significance, if they have no semantic value. The Court of Chancery initiates their cancerous proliferation of paper as a force that upends their typical status as the overlooked material substrate of signification. The legal copies that come Snagsby's way, for instance, have heightened natural properties:

Mr. Snagsby is behind his counter in his grey coat and sleeves, inspecting an indenture of several skins which has just come in from the engrosser's, an immense desert of law-hand and parchment, with here and there a resting-place of a few large letters to break the awful monotony and save the traveller from despair. Mr Snagsby puts up at one of these inky wells and greets the stranger with his cough of general preparation for business. (728)

Snagsby's engagement with these "skins" is the navigation of topography and this interaction emphasizes the unnoticed blank space that marks the absence of text. The association with a desert draws attention to parchment's material properties; it has a sandy colour and has been dried out through its curing. When we fail to notice the paper—here, the parchment—of a text, it is because we, as readers, use paper to background the type or writing on a page. Paper offers a physical field of contrast that at once aids and stands against linguistic significance. *Bleak House* consistently emphasizes paper, the designated canvas of signification, for its own ontic quality, which, in its sheer ubiquity, supplements and even dwarfs textual signification. The document, however, is a "desert of *law-hand and parchment*" (emphasis added). The document is dry in a

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instance of waste paper (paper made of repurposed waste) that proliferates (books with wood-pulp paper that quickly yellow and crumble sooner become waste paper); not even the physical media of literature escapes entanglement in a waste ecology.

figurative sense; the reading is uninteresting and, ultimately, unvalued. What little interest the document presents is in the “few large letters” that “break the awful monotony and save the traveller from despair.” These few points of interest, which provide the interaction with its only notable moments, has a material source; the visual variety offered by the occasional large initial is what gives this text some significance rather than its written context, which John Jarndyce assures readers will remain fundamentally valueless. Throughout the Court of Chancery, barristers’ papers are not known by their written contents, but depicted as: “A battery of blue bags . . . loaded with heavy charges of paper” (19). The pun that casts these papers as both military ammunition and a grouped series of items—playing on the use of “battery” and “charges”—highlights the quantity that makes their meaning impossible to decipher. The copy is also, then, a desert of meaning—that is, it is a copy, and does not produce any new textual content. As we shall see, it is this quality of the copy, unproductive of meaning but productive of largely wasted paper, that defines the battery of papers’ ultimate retort to significance.

As an institution with an ecological structure, Chancery suits also attract parasites. The lawyers representing the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suitors, including Conversation Kenge and the predatory Vholes, are too happy to fund their livelihood through their clients’ vain attempts to find meaning or purpose in the wastes and copies accumulated in Chancery. These parasitic characters assume a language that is curiously focused on the material. Vholes, for instance, maintains his influence over his increasingly exasperated client by insisting upon his own inanimate qualities. First, he advises Richard to be patient with the suit and to adopt “a little of my insensibility” (624). Vholes refers regularly to objects or a state of object-like “insensibility” as a source of reassurance, as though the physical immediacy of material objects offers a reprieve from the abstraction and confusion of legal administration. While Richard is ashamed at the idea of accusing Vholes of insensibility, the latter insists that such a disposition is necessary to his profession and presses the point further by rapping on his desk, which “sounds as hollow as a coffin,” and proclaiming, “This desk is your rock, sir!” (625). In Chancery, material pushes back against human signification. Characters like Richard endeavour earnestly to find some recuperative purpose in Chancery proceedings—some signifying value in the

many Jarndyce and Jarndyce papers—only to succumb bodily in their failure to exercise command over any part of this waste ecology. Although Vholes asserts a metaphor of stability (the desk as a rock), the desk produces a hollow sound, speaking out as it were against the insincerity of Vholes’s reassurances with a competing and more accurate material association (the desk as a coffin). By linking an object to the legal proceedings, Vholes borrows the authority of that image—its solidity and stability—and claims it, acquires it, on behalf of the meaningless suit.

The rampant copying work of the Jarndyce suit foregrounds the way in which material can outweigh signification. Copies are not productive of new meaning except by error. Without a corresponding increase of textual content, copies simply attenuate signification through meaningless repetition. Circulating several copies of the same document is likely to add structural confusion to a text and ultimately to produce so much material as to render all text inaccessible. The legal copies accumulated in Jarndyce and Jarndyce push this attenuation of signification to an extreme, utterly upending the ratio of paper to meaning. As we have already seen, “everybody must have copies, over and over again,” the suit accumulates “cartloads of papers,” and it is hardly surprising that “nobody wants them” when they yield “nothing but confusion and failure” (118, 118, 118, 316). And where there is little signifying value, as in Chancery documents, material accumulation becomes the only register upon which documents hold any meaning. Miss Flite’s habit of carrying “some small litter in a reticule which she calls her documents; principally consisting of paper matches and dry lavender” (14-15) marks the novel’s most whimsical satire of the copy. Miss Flite’s miscellaneous materials are no less meaningful than any legal copy in the Jarndyce suit, emphasizing not only their value as approaching that of waste, but their materiality over any textual import. The scraps of paper and dried flowers in her bag imitate a full set of legal documents of which she has more than one as she keeps several copies of this copy, with “some half-dozen reticules and work-bags, ‘containing documents’” on reserve in her apartment (73).

The copied affidavits produced by Miss Flite’s neighbour, Nemo, are a counterexample, demonstrating the extraneous significances that might arise in copies due to idiosyncrasy and error rather than textual meaning. Lady Dedlock pays these copies unusual attention,

not for their “detestable monotony” (27), but because of the unique appearance of the handwriting, which she recognizes as Captain Hawdon’s. Though she attempts to disguise her interest from Tulkinghorn, the two continue to discuss the peculiar characteristics of Nemo’s writing instead of their legal import, with Lady Dedlock asking if it is written in “law-hand,” and Tulkinghorn informing her that “the legal character which it has was acquired after the original hand was formed” (26, 27). Nemo’s aesthetic identity, engaged through the material qualities rather than the legal matter of the document, arises from the desert of the copy, again aiding and standing against its superficial communication.

When material signification overwhelms the human characters of the novel—or, rather, when the human character comes to embody material signification in Chancery—their bodies bear the marks of physical depreciation. Those who try to make waste significant in order to actually recuperate human effort, like Richard, are inevitably brought to a tragic end. As Richard becomes further entangled in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce proceedings, his body becomes increasingly marked by his interactions with the suit. Esther first realizes this in moments when Richard interacts with his heaps of legal copies: “As his look wandered over the papers again . . . I noticed how sunken and how large his eyes appeared, how dry his lips were, and how his finger-nails were all bitten away” (784). Though these are copies of legal documents, they are also figured as copies of Richard’s own psyche and obsession. Esther, seeing Richard unawares, imagines these papers as narcissistic “dusty mirrors reflecting his own mind” (784). Paper is the locus of Richard’s unhealthy obsession with the suit, one that has a material impact upon his body. These marks appear on Richard from an early point in his entanglement, shortly after Richard has hired Vholes to represent his legal interests in the suit:

Richard . . . passes under the shadow of the Lincoln’s Inn trees. On many such loungers have the speckled shadow of those trees often fallen; on the like bent head, the bitten nail, the lowering eye, the lingering step, the purposeless and dreamy air, the good consuming and consumed, the life turned sour. This lounge is not shabby yet, but that may come. Chancery, which knows no wisdom but in Precedent, is very rich in such Precedents; and why should one be different from then thousand?

Yet the time is so short since his depreciation began, that . . . Richard himself may feel his own case as if it were a startling one. . . . But injustice breeds injustice; the fighting with shadows and being defeated by them, necessitates the setting up of substances to combat; . . . (630)

As Richard is worn down, his condition is linked to the proliferation of new entities. While Richard's body—bent, bitten, lowered, lingering, consumed, and sour—depreciates in substance, “injustice breeds injustice”; his predicament gives rise to new “substances to combat.” True to its purpose, the Chancery waste ecology makes Richard productive even though it not productive on his behalf. These images of reproduced copies (Richard's case being but one of thousands of “Precedents”), of physical transformation (the early signs of Richard's shabbiness to come), and of proliferation (the breeding injustices and combative substances) articulate the stakes of Richard's circumstances in material terms. The “setting up of substances to combat” is the material situation of Richard's frustrated hopes in John Jarndyce—another body to be read, or misread, in its absorption into the suit. Richard's own body registers another revolution of cyclical, merciless waste-accumulation—the ultimate end of the individual human subject overwhelmed by material signification.

Richard describes the effect of being in Chancery as living in perpetual instability. He explains, “I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since” (371). Interestingly, Richard assigns the active verb to the suit as opposed to himself, suggesting that his life was under the organizing power of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Richard further enmeshes himself in the suit from a desire to protect his and Ada's financial interests—and tries to become a kind of curator of its materials. However, no order can be imposed upon Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which by this point has grown into such a complex ecology that it has taken to organizing its members rather than being organized by them. Those like Kenge and Vole who assist in the voracious proliferation of the suit profit from it accordingly. On the other hand, suitors such as Miss Flite, Gridley, and Richard, who are opposed to its proliferation, are eventually destroyed; Miss Flite is robbed of her mental health, and Gridley and Richard their physical health. Richard's eventual death is particularly timely.

When the suit is finally resolved, Richard's existence as a contributor to the Court's material accrual abruptly ends; released from its accumulative principles, then, Richard has no more reason to live. When the final judgement is given, announcing that the whole Jarndyce estate has been expended in legal costs, Richard tries to voice his discontent but cannot, "his mouth being full of blood" (976). It is significant that Richard is forced to embody his extreme failure to recuperate his wasted endeavours when he is thus unable to speak; his speech is physically impeded by the waste of his own body. This moment can be read as his final engagement with the material vocabulary of the Court, which has no other signification beyond accumulation. As we have seen, the Court substitutes materiality for significant writing or speech. Though Richard's continued engagement with the suit has gradually worn away his body, he has internalized the material logic of Chancery, as we see in his gradual obsession with legal copy. His final, gory exchange, then, can be read not as a frustrated complaint but as a material one. In trying to communicate within a system that does not recognize ordinary methods of signification, all he can do is spew forth his own bloodline—his physical, material argument for inheritance.

## 2.2

In a wide-ranging chapter on the social and material encounters of *Bleak House*, John Parham observes that "[l]urking beneath the material is the (barely perceptible) immaterial—the damp, smells, infections, and diseases whose consequences we cannot see. In *Bleak House*, Dickens is attempting to read and unravel the complex turbulence of these intra-actions" (121). Parham's interests in the material and immaterial registers of waste parallel my own in this chapter. He examines waste for its ecologies and connections, arguing that they stage many of the social encounters of the novel through a trans-corporeality—a concept connected to my discussion of the indigestible in the next chapter. Here, his discussion figures the material world as haunted by spreading, interconnected, unclassifiable miasmas ("the damp, smells, infections, and diseases"). These atmospheres often emulate their more material connections. Fog, as I mentioned in the previous section, responds in form to the bodies and spaces of London, mimicking even the movement of the Thames. A subtler, more disturbing example is the "greasy" air



and “tainting sort of weather. . . sinking to the spirits” (Dickens 507) that prefigures the novel’s most extraordinary engagement with waste: Krook’s spontaneous human combustion. I am interested in Parham’s sense of the immaterial atmosphere, particularly when it becomes so polluted as to seem material. However, I am interested, as well, in an immaterial connection that stems from material repetition. Interactions with the material world repeat throughout this novel, creating immaterial, implicit connections between various material encounters. Chancery recurs in a rag-and-bottle shop and in Tom-All-Alone. The bargains for meaning and agency that define Chancery’s doomed suits, reappear in the waste of these spaces. Richard’s death is only one example of the lost integrity of the individual body—and the loss of a certain version of meaning—in the accelerated materiality of the world of *Bleak House*. The novel, moreover, mourns that loss, as we see in the lingering pathos of Jo’s death, and in the abject horror of the deaths of the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suitors Tom Jarndyce (“victim of rash action – brains” (19)) and Richard Carstone (“his mouth being full of blood” (976)). The novel periodically stages the obliteration of individuals enmeshed in some form of rapacious material reproduction or accumulation. Richard’s death, however, is not the most memorable of these examples. Rather, Krook’s final engagement with his waste-full shop has become the novel’s signature moment of lost integrity in the face of a waste ecology.

Recalling *Bleak House*’s opening image of mud accruing at compound interest, Krook and his rag-and-bottle shop extend this metaphor of accumulation that devalues. He has “a liking for rust and must and cobwebs” because “all’s fish that comes to my net” (70). In other words, Krook treasures the unsanitary increase of valueless material that is produced by his hoard because it is nonetheless an increase of matter. It is this behaviour, ultimately, that he claims is the origin of his nickname, “the Lord Chancellor” (69). Krook “can’t abear to part with anything [he] once lay[s] hold of . . . or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about [him]” (70). This prioritizing of increased matter at the expense of value, even sanitation, parallels the structure of the Court of Chancery, which is intended for the oversight of equity but is portrayed as harvesting legal documents, labour, and funds rather than concluding ongoing suits. Both institutions function according to an eccentric avarice for more material.

The primary business of Krook's shop is not to acquire business at all, but tenaciously to accumulate more wares. This warehouse—in which “Everything seemed to be bought, and nothing to be sold” (67)—forgoes exchange for hoarding. The shop is a site of competing measures of valuation and devaluation, a confusion fostered by Krook's practices of accumulation. Though Krook's is nominally a business, it has fallen into ruin because he would rather amass rust, must, and cobwebs instead of altering, cleaning, or selling any part of his hoard for profit. Krook explains that the shop is a place of “so many things . . . of so many kinds, and all, as the neighbours think (but *they* know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin” (70).<sup>29</sup> In this place, material accumulation takes precedence over all—over sales, maintenance, repairs, renovation, even cleaning. Unlike his neighbours (who “know nothing”), Krook embraces the wasteful and ruinous process; the many things of many kinds gather dust, filth, and mould, which effects a physical, material addition to his stores and advances a goal of accumulation if not one of fiscal value. What for some qualifies as “wasting away and going to rack and ruin” is for Krook the successful accomplishment of his shop's true purpose.

Krook's hoarding does not simply lay waste to his wares in a physical sense; it also wastes language and writing as mediums of signification. Papers comprise a significant portion of Krook's business, though he is not able to read. The novel is careful to emphasize that Krook's papers are both a financial waste—in that he does not sell them—and a waste of language—in that the sole proprietor of the papers can not read them and jealously guards them from being read by others. Instead, Krook's relationship to language is to treat it as a hoard on a few different levels. He has a hoard of letters, including the bundle of Lady Dedlock's love letters that he steals from Hawdon. Krook also has a hoard of upper and lower case letters, in a sense. He can reproduce individual letters because, as Jobling reports, he has a photographic memory for any writing he has

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<sup>29</sup> There are two voices at play in the final clause of this sentence; it is at once Krook's proud statement of his wares going to waste and ruin, and also a summary of his neighbours' critical opinions. In these two senses, the final clause contains both a positive and a negative sensibility: the negative, for Krook, is to “know nothing” or to lack things; the positive is to possess a motley assembly of things.

seen. In spite of this ability, Krook still cannot read; his hoard of internal images remains as unstructured and disordered as the clutter of his shop. This suggests that he perceives the pure materiality of texts—that language for him is a series of visual impressions—detached from their semantic value. He has, essentially, a store of accumulated images that happen to represent graphemes, words, and whole documents. Like the steadily increasing bags of useless legal papers in the Jarndyce suit, Krook mimics the same repetitive cycles of waste-accumulation that characterize the Court of Chancery.

Krook's approach to writing also follows a principle of accumulation and multiplication; he writes by producing copies of the various writing he has seen. When he writes the letter "J" for Esther, she notices that he does so "in a very curious manner, beginning with the end of the letter and shaping it backward. It was a capital letter, not a printed one, but just such a letter as any clerk in Messrs Kenge and Carboy's office would have made" (75-76). Unfamiliar with standard handwriting techniques, Krook writes by enacting a visual fidelity to the writing he has access to—i.e., legal documents—to the extent of reproducing the standard cursive style of "any clerk in Messrs Kenge and Carboy's office." In effect, he sketches a picture of a letter rather than expressing it in writing. Contrary to the usual speed expected of copying work, however, Krook's writing-by-copy is a slow and inefficient process; he does not write in full words but, palimpsest-like, writes one letter in chalk, erases it, writes the next letter, erases it, and repeats this process for the remaining letters of the word. He cannot connect letters into their standard sequential order, nor insert them into a value system of linguistic meaning. Instead, he accumulates letters, building up layers of images that the reader must assemble into recognizable words. In this moment, the novel offers the notion of words as an accumulation of letters, allowing us to glimpse at a fundamental level the strange logic of a space where gathering hampers signification and value.

That Krook develops this peculiar regimen of self-education, that he desires access to the signification of language, suggests that he does attempt to find some deeper significance in his wasteful hoarding. However, his long orientation toward accumulation interferes with this endeavour. When John Jarndyce points out to Krook that he would learn to read and write more easily if he were taught by another, Krook, "with a wonderfully

suspicious flash of his eye,” replies: “Aye, but they might teach me wrong! . . . I don’t know what I may have lost, by not being learnd afore. I wouldn’t like to lose anything by being learnd wrong now” (237). Notably, Krook frames his distrust of education in terms of a loss. He is too far defined by his drives to accumulate, and in adopting the same approach to language undermines his search for semic knowledge. Though he stands to gain by being taught, the slightest chance of “los[ing] anything” further through an imperfect education excites all of his suspicions and possessiveness. Krook’s writing method undermines linguistic signification, straining even Esther’s relationship to language when he writes out the word “Jarndyce” for her; it is harder to read a word the letters of which are only visible one at a time. Krook’s discrete letters may mimic the movement of relational text, but that text’s value as a tool of signification is diminished because he is afraid to lose any further information. Krook has hoarded waste—has submitted to cycles of waste-accumulation—for too long to retrieve any further meaning from it.

Within the orbit of the rag-and-bottle shop, however, Krook is not the only character who overlooks the semantic meaning of written text for the meanings suggested by the material characteristics of writing. When Krook copies out the name “Hawdon” from the direction of one of the love letters, Jobling correctly identifies the original as a woman’s writing based on the aesthetic qualities rather than the linguistic properties that Krook mimics; as he observes, the writing “slopes a good deal, and the end of the letter ‘n,’ long and hasty” (512). In order to fulfill their task of reading Krook’s writing, both Esther and Jobling are guided toward accumulating letters, whether alphabetical or postal, with a particular focus on their material features. And though theirs are not examples of how Krook himself accumulates, they do suggest that the rag-and-bottle shop is a site of analogous impulses of accumulation. Krook’s, in other words, draws others to varying degrees into acts of accumulation.

Accumulation in Krook’s makes waste of material, leading to the fluid boundaries of the wares and their tendency to bleed into each other. For instance, Krook’s legal documents infuse his other wares with a legal character. When Esther, Richard, and Ada see his “heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls and discoloured and dog’s-eared law-papers”

(68), this leads them to link a series of objects to the legal profession. As Esther relates, they:

. . . could have fancied that all the rusty keys, of which there must have been hundreds huddled together as old iron, had once belonged to doors of rooms or strong chests in lawyers' offices. The litter of rags tumbled partly into and partly out of a one-legged wooden scale, hanging without any counterpoise from a beam, might have been counsellors' bands and gowns torn up. One had only to fancy, . . . that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete. (68)

The rusted keys that might have come from anywhere may very well belong to generations of law offices and lawyers' strong boxes. The litter of rags could indeed be the torn fragments of counsellors' uniforms. Even Richard's joke might be true: the clean-picked bones might after all include the bones of former clients. In their accumulated state, these items move easily in and out of different categories of signification. The legal papers, rusty keys, clothing rags, and human bones thrown together in masses all appear equally linked to or tainted by decay. This passage provides an early sense of how waste spreads by association—legal documents register more clearly as waste in their association with other useless things. The keys are gathering rust instead of opening the hundreds of doors and chests to which they belong. Neither rags nor bones are used or even repurposed here, as they might have been in Venus's shop. Even more grotesquely, Guppy is ready to “cut [his] hand off” (516) after touching the grease that turns out to be human tallow. Dickens creates a heightened sense of the decay produced by accumulation in this sequence of useless, wasted things. And in maintaining a fluid relationship to stable systems of meaning, accumulated material in this shop develops its own emergent significance beyond the language written on the papers, the use-value of keys and clothing, and the abjection and reverence that we invest in human bones.

What we find in Krook's decaying, accumulated wares, then, is a deterioration of the boundaries between material bodies, living and nonliving. As a result, the human bodies that pass through Krook's shop are liable to be reoriented toward, or even to embody,

waste. Krook's hoard is indiscriminate to the point of including human parts. In their first meeting, Krook covets Ada's hair to add to his "three sacks of ladies' hair" (69). Indeed, so distracted is he by the prospect of a new addition to his store that he interrupts his own monologue explaining his nickname. He takes hold of a strand of Ada's hair, captivated, not out of a lover's but an appraiser's appreciation, attentive to its "colour" and "texture" (69). Human hair was a crafting material in the Victorian period, but even the novel itself acknowledges a certain grotesque excess in this stockpile of hair and an uneasy quality to his ready and exact knowledge of his inventory. Later interceding on Esther's behalf, Richard alludes to this excess, remarking: "Don't be tempted. Three sacks below are quite enough for Mr Krook!" (76). Krook's fixation with Ada's hair, and his desire to add that hair to his bags, represents a threat to her bodily integrity. Predatory in a strictly accumulative sense, he sees this living woman as simply a carrier of what could be another bag of ladies' tresses. In this action, Krook mimics the subtler, more sinister devaluation of human life and the rapacious growth of accumulation that we also see in Chancery. The gathering of one material incites more of the same. Krook mentions his three sacks of ladies' hair to Ada as if the fact of his already having some women's hair was a likely means of persuasion. In death, both Nemo and Krook befoul the walls "with soot, and grease, and dirt" or falling flakes of soot that "smears, like black fat!" (164, 512), as if the first instance invited the second. In all of these cases, accumulation causes some form of devaluation; Ada's hair is less aesthetically valuable cut off and in bags than when attached to her head, while the two deaths leave the rag-and-bottle shop less economically valuable as lodgings for rent. The effect of accumulation, moreover, is to devalue bodies and wares, both economically and by blurring the division between subject and object; in this world, people are continually on the verge of being reduced to their material parts.

These dissolving distinctions between human body and collectible object are ultimately the result of humans' failure to exercise command over accumulated waste, or to retrieve new meaning out of accumulated waste. When Nemo's (i.e., Hawdon's) body is

discovered, there follows a brief investigation into his identity that is restricted to the clues afforded by his dead body.<sup>30</sup> When asked if he knew anything of his lodger's past life, Krook answers, "You might as well ask me to describe the ladies whose heads of hair I have got in sacks down-stairs" (168). This ready comparison suggests that Krook was already in the habit of considering Nemo as part of his wares; the shop owner can no more find meaning in his lodger's corpse than he can identify the origins of his ladies' hair or decipher the contents of his legal papers. The devaluation that occurs through excessive accumulation—i.e., the fluidity of boundaries—also has ramifications that are inscribed onto the human body. We see how the human body comes to embody waste in Krook's spectacularized death, when it becomes clear that his wares have always threatened to absorb or consume the characters of the novel. In evaporating into the atmosphere, coating the walls and window sills, he fulfills the continued accumulation of the shop. His evaporated remains join ranks with the shop's secondary materials—the dust, must, and cobwebs that Krook was so loath to part with when living—adding, ultimately, to the material volume of this hoard. By the time his remains are discovered, Krook is so thoroughly reduced to lifeless residue—to "suffocating vapour in the room, and a dark greasy coating on the walls and ceiling" (517)—that Guppy and Jobling do not register immediately what has happened to him. The novel is clear that this particular death is the only one possible for Krook, that his body can do nothing but ignite or subject itself to "none other of all the deaths that can be died" (519). Krook has fully transformed from subject to object, into a final, abject addition to his own stock.

The categorical fluidity of accumulated objects in Krook's hoard, including Krook's body, haunts and disturbs the other characters of the novel. Guppy and Jobling are acutely aware of Krook's lingering physical remains when they revisit the shop after his

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<sup>30</sup> Allan Woodcourt, with his physician's experience, is able to read the story of the body to some extent; "from his appearance and condition," Woodcourt deduces that Nemo "must have been a good figure when a youth, and I dare say good-looking" (168) in his attempt to find indications of a deeper significance, as if the body were a document. However, the body is an illegible text both to the solicitor Tulkinghorn, who looks to the body to decipher the hidden significance of another text (i.e., Nemo's copied affidavits, which Lady Dedlock recognizes), and to Krook, who only considers him another material body within the building.

death; both “have a great disinclination to touch any object, and carefully blow the dust from it first” (635). The “little bundle of burnt paper” that, after Krook’s combustion, seems to be “steeped in something” has fused with his remains, becoming part paper, part ink, part human (519). From legal documents, to keys, to clothing, to bones, to human tallow, and to greasy love letters, all of the accumulated stuff in this shop is governed by a category confusion meaning that materiality itself is the primary significance emergent in such an unstructured, fluid space. The novel’s characters respond to that confusion in kind. Krook’s lodger, Miss Flite, treats her birds, omens, and acquaintances as interchangeable; “the Wards in Jarndyce” (922) are to her, equally, two friends (Ada and Richard), two omens, and two birds (which she names after Ada and Richard).

## 2.3

This section turns from a search for justice in legal papers, and for the value in masses of inventory, to homemaking or the endeavour to situate oneself in a home with all its attendant concerns over location and security. Just as earnest human endeavours fail in Chancery and in Krook’s, however, so too do these endeavours to create a home end up as waste. Tom-all-Alone’s is a spatial and topographical manifestation of the destructive qualities of Chancery. It is a locus of the wasted efforts of those seeking a home or a place to belong in order to avoid becoming waste themselves. This street is post-apocalyptic in the sense that it represents the aftermath of humans’ failure to overcome their orientation to waste—their failure to recuperate some meaning within waste, whether waste-paper or waste-location.

Tom-all-Alone’s attracts those who cannot permanently attach themselves to a home or place, and this in some measure is the work of Chancery. The present state of Tom-all-Alone’s owes its origins to Chancery proceedings, though the exact circumstances of these are unclear:

This desirable property is in Chancery, of course. It would be an insult to the discernment of any man with half an eye to tell him so. Whether “Tom” is the popular representative of the original plaintiff or defendant in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, or whether Tom lived here when the suit had laid the street waste, all alone, until other settlers came to join



him, or whether the traditional title is a comprehensive name for a retreat cut off from honest company and put out of the pale of hope, perhaps nobody knows. Certainly Jo don't know. (257)

Being in Chancery disrupts the concept of place itself; the grammatical ambiguity of being “in Chancery” allows the expression to denote either that the neighbourhood is located on Chancery property or that the property was seized in the name of Chancery. This street of dilapidated houses may or may not have been owned by a Jarndyce suitor once. The name may or may not originate from the street's sharing, along with the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit, the condition of being “cut off from honest company and put out of the pale of hope.” In *Tom-all-Alone's*, only the material accumulation that occurs within the space is relevant. How the neighbourhood came to be, the condition of the streets, the medical, legal, or educational welfare of the people who live there—all such concerns are immaterial to its relentless acquisition. What is relevant—what everybody knows so well that it would be an insult to presume otherwise—is that the place is in Chancery.

The cycle of waste-by-accumulation recurs here as much as in the Court of Chancery or in *Krook's*. Under whatever auspices this property was claimed in Chancery, it would have been seized because as property it once held value. Once lost to the miserable suitors who were barred from using these places, the houses were left to succumb to disrepair and to decay. The cycles of waste in this street, then, centre on the concept of place and the significance with which a place is imbued. If *Tom-all-Alone's* is an attempt to classify or somehow demarcate property under the Court's protection, that designation fails, the property becomes derelict with disuse, the empty houses are co-opted by self-appointed slum landlords, and the houses regularly crumble in their ongoing decay. Moreover, *Tom-all-Alone's* is a place where the homeless endeavour to find or to lay claim to a home within a crumbling, disreputable neighbourhood, the decaying or wasted houses of which are the waste homes of London. When a building crumbles, the individual crevices of the fallen debris are sold again as lodgings, and attract further numbers of placeless people afresh.

Vague though they may be, the slum's ties to Chancery offer context for its extreme structural chaos. In *The Novel and the Police*, Miller observes the "ultimate unlocalizability" of the Court of Chancery—the incomprehensible expansiveness of its presence (61). "What Chancery produces," Miller writes, "or threatens to produce, is an organization of power that, ceasing entirely to be a *topic*, has become topography itself: a system of control that can be all-encompassing because it cannot be encompassed in turn" (61). The crumbling and disintegrated buildings of Tom-all-Alone's realize, on a material level, the elusive structural power of Chancery. "To violent acts of penetration," Miller writes, the Court "prefers the milder modes of permeation, and instead of being densely consolidated into a force prepared to encounter a certain resistance, it is so finely vaporized . . . that every surface it needs to attack is already porously welcoming it" (61). As a by-product of the wastes in Chancery, Tom-all-Alone's is a waste ecology that has emerged out of another. An entire neighbourhood permeated with the de-structuring powers of Chancery, Tom-all-Alone's has grown into a nightmarish landscape in which no categories remain intact. A kind of extension of the Court of Chancery, the ecology that develops out of this urban space operates along the same mandate of accumulation. The houses here are in such dilapidated condition that a house crumbles to the ground at periodic intervals. New tenants, however, still seek shelter in the rubble of the newly levelled building; "[t]he gaps remain, and there are not unpopular lodgings among the rubbish" (257). The sudden crumbling of a house gives rise to new material; the reordered spaces attract new bodies that crowd together within the debris, give rise to "a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine" (257), and offer new crevices for mould and festering water to pool. Bodies and spaces converge in these sites of material collapse.

With these origins in Chancery, Tom-all-Alone's confuses the very concept of imbuing a place or space with significance. Observing the impossibility of anything like structural or categorical consistency, Miller suggests that "what is most radically the matter with being 'in Chancery' is not that there may be no way out of it (a dilemma belonging to the problematic of the carceral), but, more seriously, that the binarisms of inside-outside, here/elsewhere become meaningless and the ideological effects they ground impossible" (62). We may borrow from Miller's striking vocabulary of broken binaries to suggest the key attribute that distinguishes how accumulation, materiality, and category confusion

operate separately in Krook's rag-and-bottle shop, in the Court of Chancery, and in Tom-all-Alone's. Where Krook's accumulates and uniformly objectifies its wares to the detriment of their economic value, and the Court of Chancery abuses its powers of acquisition in order to supplant meaning with the material, Tom-all-Alone's is a space of nightmarish, hyper-materiality that results from not just Chancery but all of London having accumulated abandoned households, both the working and unemployed poor, sewage water, and discarded rubbish within this wasteland of a neighbourhood. My intent, then, is not to mark superficial analogies between useless wares, wasted paper, and London's poor, but rather to read devaluing accumulation at the point where it comes home to the human orientation to place. Krook and Richard both become materially tied to and compromised by the accumulating logic of specific institutions. Here, that accumulating logic of decay not only collapses spaces physically, but also categorically. The classifications that we use to signify a space, to invest that space with anthropocentric meaning, fall apart and morph along an endless series of disruptions.

Tom-all-Alone's presents the body and its surroundings in steep decline. A "villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water," as well as crumbling houses and precarious ruins, these slums have been tacitly claimed and rented out to those desperate enough to wish to take shelter therein (358). This image is one of waste that has grown wildly out of control. As a space in which the outdoors bleeds into the indoors—a kind of storehouse whose products have decomposed into one another—Tom-all-Alone's is a site of dissolving ontological boundaries between material entities. The street offers a version of what Maurizia Boscagli terms "a materiality out of bounds" that altogether rejects physical, ideological, and semiotic order (3). What emerges is a hyper-productivity akin to what we saw in *Our Mutual Friend*, one that consistently works to obscure and devalue material hierarchies. Tom-all-Alone's exhibits a hyper-productivity in decay. As the novel's omniscient narrator tells us:

... these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever

and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years—though born expressly to do it. (256-257)

Through Dickens's layered metaphors, this passage performs the permeability of classification in Tom-all-Alone's. The "tumbling tenements" are like a "ruined human wretch," but this is ultimately the only human figure offered in a vision of seething vitality. There is, however, a general sense that the human population, the animal population, and the insect population blur together under the umbrella term of "a crowd of foul existence"; the passage merges the rats that crawl, the snakes that coil, the maggots that multiply, with the humans that leave footprints, into vaguely interrelated metaphors of gathering. Tom-all-Alone's is, in other words, a space of such radical material boundaries that it collapses the distinctions between buildings, animals, insects, disease, and people alike. The slum is nightmarish in its continual warping of classification, in the impossibility of identity and individuality therein.

Human bodies are not exempt from the devaluation born of excessively accumulating materials. As Dickens's poor accumulate in Tom-all-Alone's, they present a horrific breakdown of the categorical distinction between living humans and nonliving waste—of the nightmare of ambiguities that result when humans are forced to embody waste. In offering this image of humans as a single, undifferentiated "swarm of misery," Dickens represents a nightmare of radical materiality that is deliberately ruthless in its equation of people living in poverty with disease-carrying parasites. The human population that has been devalued by London society is expressly devalued here in their accumulation. The purpose of this ruthlessness, which is at odds with the usual tenor of Dickens's representations of the socially and economically underprivileged, is to illustrate in vivid, grotesquely material terms the outcome of considering people as generalized multitudes rather than as individuals. One need only to look to *Bleak House*'s sympathetic and highly individualized representations of Jo, Liz, and Jenny, or even the brickmaker's offended defiance of Mrs. Pardiggle, to understand that this portrait of humans living as "vermin parasites" is indeed pointed, staging the horrific implications of neglecting or dismissing the suffering of the poor. The apparent parasitism of the residents in Tom-all-

Alone's is also mirrored by the hypocritical parasitism of Lord Coodle and company, those aristocratic authorities who appear as a similarly indistinguishable mass defined by the sole purpose of increasing in number. In both cases, rampant, concentrated accumulation is what transforms individuals into indistinguishable, redundant, vigorous waste.

This brimming, surfeit of flesh and debris is matched by a swarming excess of infection that fills ruined spaces and moves out with the crowd, "carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle" and his peers. These footprints, then, present their own microcosm of a waste ecology. As I have defined it in the previous chapter, a waste ecology is an accumulation of interrelated material connections born of the discarded, which becomes productive or transformative of new material connections. It is through this productivity that the undifferentiated matter of Tom-all-Alone's pushes back against London's broader population, chiefly through teeming, spreading disease. Ralph Smith provides historical context for Dickens's shifting opinions on public health during the mid-Victorian period, which we can productively apply to these footprints. Between 1842 and 1855, Dickens shifted from his initial support of Chadwick and the sanitarian movement. Smith compares the fever narratives published in *Household Words* between 1850 and 1855, finding that Dickens's journalism increasingly reflects a discomfort with, and eventually a complete opposition toward, the foundational principles of the sanitarian movement for three main reasons: firstly, his scepticism of Parliament's ability to effect sanitary reforms; secondly, his gradual adoption of the view that disease was spread by contagion and not simply by the inhalation of vaporized waste; thirdly, that he objected to sanitarians' tendency to consider the poor as "irresponsible objects" that caused rather than were the victims of epidemics (Smith 159). Given this context, we may read the fever-carrying footprint as a site of interaction between bodies and space. *Bleak House's* initial serialization places the novel, given Smith's timeline, during the turning point of Dickens's attitudes toward sanitarian reform. We can also trace an ambiguous understanding of disease transmission; infection in Tom-all-Alone's carries qualities of both theories of miasma and disease contagion, portraying at once infectious spaces and infectious bodies.

Bodily porousness meets spatial porousness within a site of accumulation, fulfilling Miller's suggestion that Chancery and its satellites corrode the signification and ideological power of "the binarisms of inside-outside, here/elsewhere." Tom-all-Alone's is a site of accumulation, but its porousness reaches outward to the rest of London. In spite of the ineffectual and even ruinous "mighty speech-making" in Parliament that has led to the present condition of this slum, however, Tom-all-Alone's has the final word (708):

Even the winds are his messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives . . . but shall work its retribution through every order of society up to the proudest of the proud and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge. (710)

The accumulation and neglectful treatment of the poor by the rest of London has material consequences for the city as a whole, an effect of large-scale devaluation. The new material that has grown out of the decaying houses—the corrupted blood, the atoms of slime, the cubic inches of pestilential gas—transgress the prescribed boundaries of Tom-all-Alone's and exact their revenge by transforming the spaces and bodies it encounters to new agents of contagion or death. An apocalyptic double to Chancery, Tom-all-Alone's similarly knows no bounds. As with the metaphors of parasitism, the images in this passage suggest a similar material hybridity. The pestilence here is at once bloody ("a drop of Tom's corrupted blood"), slimy ("an atom of Tom's slime"), and gaseous ("a cubic inch of any pestilential gas"). The source of disease, in other words, is a hybrid of material classification—of abject materials at once human, sedimentary, and vaporous.

The novel's most overt representation of embodied waste is Jo, who stands as the novel's exemplar for a living human treated as excess, as surplus, even as an object. Jo gets "hustled, and jostled, and moved on," finding that he has "no business, here, or there, or

anywhere” and yet is “perplexed by the consideration that [he *is*] here somehow, too, and everybody overlooked [him] until [he] became the creature that [he *is*]!” (257-258). Jo is not the active agent, but the passive agent, here. Jo is excluded from legal, social, and linguistic systems. A “rejected witness,” who cannot read, who “don’t know nothink,” and who “can’t exactly say” what knowledge he does have, Jo is fundamentally cut off from the systems of representation that surround him (181, 257, 181). His aimless shuffle through the streets can be read as the movement of a discarded and undesirable object. Indeed, it often is by characters like Lady Dedlock and the London constabulary, who view him as matter of no use and of no classification. Jo’s existence nonetheless asserts itself. He lives in a “strange state,” considered “scarcely human (as in the case of [his] offering [himself] for a witness), but to feel it of [his] own knowledge all [his] life!” (258). Jo’s passivity is predetermined by both his inability to read and his inability to find a permanent home. The novel satirically posits that full human subjectivity must rely upon engagement with a linguistic system of signification that, regrettably, Jo cannot access. The source of the strangeness he feels, then, is a bodily materiality which asserts itself above and beyond human subjectivity and literacy to the extent that Jo’s “whole material and immaterial life is wonderfully strange; his death, the strangest thing of all” (258). Strangeness in death, here, means the total transformation from animate to inanimate—an existence defined entirely by the material, outside of the linguistic. Jo is caught between an inaccessible definition of the human and an unimaginable existence as pure material. And this hybridity—between subject and material, between culture and exclusion—expands outward to the size of a city street in the form of Tom-all-Alone’s.

Unlike Krook’s rag-and-bottle shop and the Court of Chancery, Tom-all-Alone’s is not an agent of accumulation but rather the site in which the city has accumulated. It serves as a kind of storage facility for the seized properties in Chancery. It is the only place to which the unwanted Jo may “move on” (308). Everyone appears concerned about the condition of Tom-all-Alone’s; “both in and out of Parliament,” there is “much wrathful disputation how Tom shall be got right” (708-710, 710). However, like Mrs. Pardiggle’s criticism of “the untidy habits” of the poor—a presumptuous remark resembling sanitarian discourse—such disputation turns out to be ineffectual and chiefly demonstrative (130). Meanwhile, as Tom-all-Alone’s is “reclaimed according to

somebody's theory but nobody's practice," these formal debates scatter yet more "dust and noise" to accumulate somewhere (710). Claimed by everyone and wanted by no one, Tom-all-Alone's has material implications for all of London. As Steinlight has recently observed in *Populating the Novel*, the epidemic that spreads from Tom-all-Alone's decimates the distinctions between classed people and spaces. As if in retaliation to the endeavour to sequester illnesses within Tom-all-Alone's, the disease that Jo carries into Bleak House seems to rebuke those who would see certain persons tied to certain places. A disease that does not stay in one place vaunts the human failure to define, classify, and infuse meaning into a place. Steinlight's remarks on disease contagion in *Bleak House* can therefore be pushed further; infectious disease in the novel suggests the power of multiplicity. The power of the disease is the power of numbers; it is the overwhelming accumulation of persons and places left to decay, and the failed signification of place as concept, that levels class categories, spatial boundaries, humans, and biohazardous waste. The struggle of those who cannot place themselves is echoed by the contagious disease which, like the ever moved-on Jo, cannot possibly stay contained in one place. Ultimately, Tom-all-Alone's houses both those who cannot find a place and a disease that is place-less or refuses to be bound to a place.

## 2.4

The excessive accumulation that characterizes this slum returns us to the heart of Dickensian London, with compounded increase of dirt and debris. As Nemo's body and Ada's hair are curated as collectible wares—as Flite mimics the accumulation of law-papers with her documents—as the faceless "crowd" of Tom-all-Alone's lurks about newcomers "like a dream of horrible faces, and fades away up alleys and into ruins, and behind walls; and with occasional cries and shrill whistles of warning, thenceforth flits about them until they leave the place" (358)—these accumulations exhibit a broader devaluation not only in what they accumulate but in those who orbit those accumulations.



## Chapter 3

### 3 As Within, So Without: Spectres of Waste in Le Fanu's "Green Tea"

In a medieval Christian legend recounting the trying of Saint Dominic, the devil appears to the saint in various guises to distract him from his devotional reading. Saint Dominic resists these annoyances with a folkloric response, humorously drafting Satan into his bible study. Although the allegory of the devil's attempts to distract Saint Dominic from his religious duty is no longer common knowledge, this narrative was frequently depicted—most notably in Pietro della Vecchia's *St. Dominic and the Devil* (1630), an oil canvas rendition of the moment when the devil appears to the saint as a small, black-furred monkey with two pins of red light reflected in its eyes. Robert Southey also mentions this legend in a tract on "The History of the Inquisitions" (1811), and his description offers a vivid account of the encounter as it would have been known and circulated in the nineteenth century:

The manufacturers of hagiology are sometimes playful in their inventions. They tell us, that as the Saint was reading one day, the devil annoyed him in the shape of a flea, skipping backward and forward upon the page, in order to divert his attention from the devout subject of the book before him; but Dominic soon spoiled his sport, for he fixed him as a mark at the place where he left off, and used him in this manner through the whole volume. On another occasion the devil came to tease him in the form of a monkey: Dominic was too much used to such visits to be embarrassed by them; he called him to hold the candle, which he made him do till it had burnt down to the snuff, to the sore annoyance of the paw which held it. (324)

As Southey makes clear, both the insect and the animal here represent the satanic danger of attention diverted from religious devotion. Here, the dutiful and morally vigilant Saint Dominic is undeterred from his studies, captures two creatures known for their physical alacrity and evasive skill, and commands both in the service of religious study. Southey's version of this legend stresses the importance of a zealous, scholarly attention and of resisting persistent temptation. And if Southey's account was the most widely-known

version of the legend, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's short Victorian ghost story, "Green Tea," was more influential for fusing this medieval allegory to contemporary Victorian values and anxieties.

"Green Tea" is the first of the series of short stories that Le Fanu narrates through Doctor Martin Hesselius, a German physician who evidently specializes in cases of occult or of metaphysical interest, and from whose personal letters and notes these occult tales ostensibly originated. The short story begins when Hesselius investigates the supernatural visitations that stubbornly plague a clergyman, the Reverend Mr. Jennings. These visitations or hauntings take the form of a small black monkey with glowing red eyes; they begin when Jennings takes large quantities of green tea during his studies of ancient European paganism. At first, the monkey only follows Jennings in watchful silence; gradually, however, its presence becomes more menacing, disrupting Jennings's sermons, whispering various blasphemous or disturbing remarks in his ear. The monkey's appearances drive Jennings to distraction, particularly whenever the latter attempts to fulfil his devotional duties. By the end of the story, just as Jennings finally confides his troubles to Hesselius, the monkey reappears and drives the clergyman to suicide.

Like Southey's retelling of Saint Dominic's demonic visitations, "Green Tea" is concerned with specific forms of scholarly engagement and the means necessary to sustain that engagement. The saint's demons attempt the same kind of dissolution of devotional attention that Jennings experiences when he describes the monkey's "indefinable power to dissipate thought" (30). The flea that dances across Saint Dominic's book of devotion attempts a visual barrier similar to that which Le Fanu's monkey successfully accomplishes when it appears in Jennings's pulpit and squats over his book, interrupting both his reading and his sermon. Furthermore, just as "Green Tea" somewhat confusedly muddles together green tea, pagan metaphysics, and demonic monkeys, the demonic distractions that threaten Saint Dominic's devotional work have a multitude of forms.

Where "Green Tea" and the hagiographic legend differ, however, is in their protagonists' chosen approaches to their studies, as well as in the power that those characters exercise

over their respective demons. On the one hand, we find an important food-based difference when Jennings turns to green tea for an enabling agent; the saint, on the other, appears fuelled by an unwavering religious devotion and presumably a more Christian sacrament given that one of Saint Dominic's miracles involved the creation of wine. Whereas the monkey drives Jennings to distraction and suicide, the saint exhibits a mastery that allows him to capture the devil in its manifest forms and commands him in the service of the saint's religious devotion. The tragedy of Jennings's case is that his monkey succeeds where Saint Dominic's flea and monkey fail. This medieval legend of hagiography therefore re-emerges, transformed and adapted, in Le Fanu's text. "Green Tea" is effectively a grim adaptation of a medieval allegory. Those moments in which the two narratives part ways foreground the specific preoccupations to which Le Fanu's text responds. Instead of a scene in which religious devotion and discipline are proof against the supernatural, the demonic, or the occult, Le Fanu's spectral monkey gradually but relentlessly gains in power, changing in ways that are initially small but then increase in intensity over time. At first, it is barely distinguishable in the darkness by its glowing red eyes; later, the monkey is surrounded by an ambient red light that glows like embers; later still, the monkey is so visible that Jennings is entirely distracted and absorbed by its movements and he sees the monkey perfectly through closed eyelids. The monkey's behaviour, too, begins lethargic only to become increasingly energetic and disruptive, culminating in the demon's incessantly urging Jennings to kill himself.

Scholars have named a few texts as the possible source material and cultural contexts for "Green Tea." The inspiration for the spectral monkey, especially, has been a major source of scholarly speculation, though literary critics have not yet observed its hagiographical resonances. W. J. McCormack argues that "Green Tea" was based on an article published in 1841 for the *Dublin University Magazine*, titled "German Ghosts and Seers," which featured glowing, disembodied eyes and a drinker of green tea. McCormack's claim is part of his larger argument that Le Fanu's story originates in and still betrays traces of an Irish gothic sensibility, though he adapted the tale for an English audience at the insistence of his publisher. William Hughes finds McCormack's argument too focused on reclaiming Le Fanu's work for an Irish gothic literary tradition. Hughes argues instead that Le Fanu adopted several narrative devices that he encountered in the gothic tales of

Samuel Warren's *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician* (1854), including the episodic character of the stories, the frame narrative of a retired physician who documented his most peculiar cases, and the inclusion of a few spectral animals. In doing so, he highlights the theological import and Swedenborgian influences of Le Fanu's highly metaphysical text. Other critics tend to be less interested in an originary inspiration, but take up similar discussions of its broader Victorian milieu. John Langan and, most recently, Melissa Dickson, analyze "Green Tea" in the context of evolutionary discourses, and read Le Fanu's monkey as a reference to Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Dickson further situates the text within the history of the British imperial tea trade, as well as within the Orientalist discourses that linked green tea consumption to opium addiction. Jen Cadwallader makes the salient point that "Green Tea" participates in a larger conversation about Victorian pharmacology. Le Fanu's plots, as Cadwallader suggests, consistently present the "near-impotent organ" (46) of the Victorian mind as submissive and susceptible to troubling new substances.

To some degree, the present chapter engages this critical tradition that examines the cultural implications of Le Fanu's text. As we will see, "Green Tea" reads as an ironic response to late-Victorian medievalism. The narrative features an allegory of failed attention, or the means by which an Anglican clergyman's concentrated religious attention is transformed by the material and spiritual conditions in which he is situated. Saint Dominic's miraculous feat is his ability to maintain a narrow, linear, and even obsessive focus upon his devotional work throughout his monastic life. Jennings, by contrast, is worldly and vulnerable to distraction. His worldliness reveals the interconnected nature of contemporary Victorian concerns including urbanization, productivity, and the imperial project. His repeatedly broken attention and ultimate suicide can be contextualized through an understanding of his situated embodiment within these interrelated anxieties of the nineteenth century. In this chapter, I draw these historically situated readings into conversation with a range of critical approaches from food studies to the new materialisms. The first section is particularly concerned with the mutually transformative relations between food and the human body. The second section builds this discussion out to encompass the vulnerability of the British subject plagued by the ghosts of empire.

More importantly, this chapter also conceives of an ecological method of reading the interrelated anxieties at play in Le Fanu's story. "Green Tea" accommodates several readings, whether of the monkey as a metaphor for imperialism and racial othering, of Jennings's tea-drinking as a euphemism for opium addiction, or of "Green Tea" as hagiographic adaptation. Under this ecological structure, all of the above readings of Le Fanu's text coalesce, with the result that "Green Tea" reflects the holism that Jennings both observes and fears in pagan metaphysics. Rather than assessing the viability of a single reading of "Green Tea," I explore the structural reasons—the waste ecologies—that enable this text to accommodate such a variety of impressions. Waste ecologies are generative; they are a source of endless meanings, as well as of the connections between those meanings. Therefore, when I consider hagiographic source material such as the legend of Saint Dominic—with its demonstration of unbreakable devotional attention and monastic asceticism—I consider that material as a foil. The legend reveals by force of contrast the ambiguous amalgamation of digestive systems, nervous systems, and the occult in "Green Tea." Instead of contending with any one interpretation over others, this chapter considers the structural ecology that gives rise to this diverse array of readings—that creates the analytical space for a spectral monkey, paganism, religious attention, and the tea at the root of each.

On the surface, "Green Tea" offers two apparently binary possibilities for Jennings's experience. Jennings might indeed be interacting with a pagan spirit or ghost. Alternatively, green tea or some active agent within the tea may act upon him as a hallucinogen. Hesselius's diagnosis toward the end of the story begins to complicate and, more particularly, interrelate these apparently contradictory interpretations. Hesselius suggests that an impurity in the tea brought Jennings into contact with the spiritual world. Critics are largely interested in examining the significance of either of these possibilities, through discussions of Orientalism, psychology, and theology. However, my interest lies in this suggestion of an interrelation that stems from impurity and waste. In Le Fanu's text, the horror does not come from the monkey, or from the ingestion of green tea; neither is the horrific point that spirits exist. One source of horror is certainly the malign interaction between spirits and humans in this text—in spirits' ability to interact with Jennings, as well as Jennings's ability to interact with them, to attract and hold their

attention, and his inability to escape their attention at will. In other words, “Green Tea” situates its horror in connections and involvements. On the level of soul and body, Jennings’s consumption of tea and—I will argue—metaphysical knowledge, connects his digestive impurities with his soul. In this way, his soul becomes a part of a broader spiritual ecology. These interactions are at once imperial and domestic; they expand outward from the monkey to larger Victorian imperial anxieties. They bring spiritual damnation and philosophical investigation to bear on psychological duress and physiological indigestion. Each interaction is complicated and often productive of unpredictable associations, but Jennings does not realize the extent to which he is situated within those associations. Beneath this horror of spectral engagement is, ultimately, a deeper horror of being involved in a waste ecology so complex and subtle that one cannot recognize the parameters of that involvement. It is a horror of being enmeshed in a waste ecology.

This chapter highlights the ecological relations of Le Fanu’s “Green Tea” through a form of waste that I call the indigestible. The indigestible refers to a specific material and power relation in which ingested matter permeates the body, and yet resists complete incorporation into that body at the same time. Informed partly by Jane Bennett’s work on edible matter and Chen’s toxicities, my view of the indigestible is as failed digestion. Digestion implies nourishment; it encompasses the successful extraction and assimilation of those material components of a food that benefit the eating body, as well as the filtration and expulsion of those non-nutritive components from the body as waste. Indigestion, on the contrary, occurs when the ingested substance refuses to be subordinated to the body that tries to consume it: it cannot be dissolved and filtered for those of its parts that are salutary; nor can its unwanted parts be so easily cast aside. When the indigestible gets taken into a body, it permeates that body but not necessarily in ways that are desirable. In “Green Tea,” the indigestible permeates even those systems of the body that it was never meant to access—systems that are not strictly the digestive system. I use “indigestible,” here, more as that which causes indigestion. As with indigestion, the indigestible is not that which may pass through a system unaltered. Rather, once ingested, it gives rise to its own transformative effects, relations, and alterations, often in toxic or occasionally hyper-productive ways. This chapter considers

the indigestible in “Green Tea” both in its physiological effects and in its parallel cultural implications. Specifically, section 1 of this chapter attends to the physiological ecologies of the indigestible, at the centre of which is Jennings’s consumption of green tea. The second section of this chapter shifts its focus to a parallel metaphorical ecology of the indigestible in which the Victorian imperial subject is permeated by a cultural and spiritual other that refuses to be assimilated.

While Le Fanu’s “Green Tea” begins as a story of digestion, it ultimately reveals the vast ecologies of the indigestible. When Jennings takes green tea to advance his studies, he strays into a nexus of physical and supernatural relations that he did not realize existed. The spectral events of “Green Tea” draw from a dizzying number of discourses, from toxic food, religious devotion, natural science, and the occult; they are at once “a symptom of nervous dyspepsia,” a “sullen” and “surly” monkey, a demon encased in a flaming glory, and a poltergeist-like creature prone to obscene gestures and speech. Given this aggregate of images loaded with metaphorical significance, Hesselius’s final diagnosis—that Jennings suffered from a combination of a disturbed circulatory system and a hereditary predisposition to suicide—falls flat. Jennings digests green tea literally, while attempting to digest paganism figuratively, only to end up overcome by both—to be digested, rather than to be the one who digests.

In his introduction to the 1947 edition of *In a Glass Darkly*, V. S. Pritchett observes Le Fanu’s remarkable ability for forcing into relief our deepest, most repressed anxieties— anxieties that burst forth in a catharsis of the occult. “Guilt is the ghost in Le Fanu,” he writes. “The secret doubt, the private shame, the unholy love, scratch away with malignant patience in the guarded mind.” From this treasure trove of psychoanalysis, Pritchett singles out “Green Tea” as a story that “weaken[s] the catch we normally keep clamped so firmly down” and unleashes “all the hags and animals of moral or Freudian symbolism” (10). Pritchett ranks Le Fanu’s tale “among the best half-dozen ghost stories in the English language” (8)—an achievement more notable for its being published at a time during the Victorian period when ghost stories were common enough to be unremarkable. Pritchett’s notion that “Green Tea” is particularly effective in staging the steady victory of repressed anxieties over “the guarded mind”—that the text registers a

nightmare of breached boundaries—still holds. The ghost in “Green Tea” is overwhelmed with layered meaning, and built into its excessive signification is a profound anxiety of classification. The nexus of physiological, neurological, and psychical experiences that Jennings encounters while studying paganism and sipping his tea is precisely what the Victorian mind attempts to guard itself against. Without the security of discrete categorization, the spiritual bleeds into the physical, the colonial into the imperial, the occult into the Anglican religion, the Victorian Gothic into the medieval Christian, the animal into the human. Ultimately, it is clear that the vulnerability of the insufficiently “guarded mind” to this complex of Imperial Gothic forces—or destructively interrelated ecologies—is what generates the horror in Le Fanu’s text.

### 3.1

“Green Tea” presents itself as the personal letters and case notes of Hesselius. In the final chapter, he offers his diagnosis, though too late to be of any use to the deceased Jennings. This diagnosis places Jennings’s tea-drinking at the centre of entangled ecologies of food, digestion, ghosts, and waste. Hesselius’s post-mortem summation of the case begins with his elaborate theory of “The Cardinal Functions of the Brain” (38). He claims to have proven the existence of a circulatory system in the brain, through which courses a fluid that is at once spectral and material: it enjoys a physical existence as a liquid, and it is also the “seat of interior vision” or “that which we have in common with spirits” (39). This language—and particularly the idea that the human-spirit connection materializes as a liquid—bears a striking resemblance to what would become known as ectoplasm from the 1890s through to the 1920s.<sup>31</sup> This spiritual “brain circulation” is, like blood circulation, transformative: “[t]he fluid, which is propagated hence through one class of nerves, returns in an altered state through another” (39). As long as the fluid maintains balanced levels across these stages of circulation, the human body cannot communicate

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<sup>31</sup> As L. Anne Delgado has recently described, late-Victorian ectoplasm referred to bodily fluids expelled by spiritualist mediums as a by-product of the spiritual communications that took place during a séance. While the term was not in use until the 1890s, Delgado suggests that earlier forms of the concept appeared in the mid-nineteenth century such as Allan Kardec’s “manifestation of the perispirit” in 1857, as well as George Henry Lewes’s “psychoplasm” in 1874 (32).



with spirits; if this balance is disrupted by the influence of certain substances, however, there are spiritual consequences. As Hesselius draws an analogy between the circulatory system of the heart to this system of psychical fluids, his language opens up the possibility of another parallel system in the human body—the digestive system:

By various abuses, among which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one, this fluid may be affected as to its quality, but it is more frequently disturbed as to equilibrium. . . . a congestion found upon the masses of brain or nerve, connected with the interior sense, forms a surface unduly exposed, on which disembodied spirits may operate: communication is thus more or less effectually established.  
(39)

The “congestion” that Hesselius describes is a digestive blockage—one that begins with ingestion, leads to an imbalanced system, creates a vulnerability within that system, and undermines the original aim of nourishment. Jennings takes excessive amounts of green tea, which permeates his various circulatory systems and disturbs the balance of ectoplasmic fluids that formerly kept unwelcome communication channels to the spirit world at bay. However sensational in detail, the process that Jennings undergoes is one of digestion gone wrong—of indigestion. And if, unlike *fin-de-siècle* ectoplasmic mediums, Jennings does not quite expel liquid waste from his orifices, he becomes a vessel for a kind of spiritual waste—a malign spectre.

Hesselius’s diagnosis reveals the physician’s unique view of waste as an excess build-up that bleeds across categories such as mind, body, and soul. His pseudo-scientific views lead us to a definition in which the indigestible not only disrupts a given system but also permeates multiple systems. The green tea that circulates Jennings’s venous arterial system also has a sympathetic impact on the parallel nervous system that Hesselius describes, which leaves it vulnerable to spiritual contact. In this text, green tea moves from expansive and large-scale systems, like the British imperial trade network, to increasingly detailed and delicate subsets of those systems, from Jennings’s digestive and arterial systems to his nervous and spiritual systems. “Green Tea,” as a whole, similarly engages the structural porousness of ecologies as diverse as imperialism, the counterfeit tea trade, paganism, digestion, spiritualism, and waste. This accrued waste, moreover,

cannot be as easily expelled from the body or filtered out. If a green tea addiction has somehow infused itself throughout Jennings's body—if it is the food waste that has corrupted the complex interrelations of his digestive, arterial, and psychical systems—then these integrated structures could not be undone even though Jennings does quit drinking green tea. Hesselius claims to have cured one similar case “by the simple application of iced eau-de-cologne” (39), and yet the material and immaterial ecologies that he describes are so exceedingly complex that his solution almost appears risible. The congestion and disrupted equilibrium that Hesselius describes speaks to a dissolution of carefully constructed boundaries. Perhaps it is less that the monkey convinced Jennings to commit suicide than that these violent impulses had already seeped into his thoughts.

When we consider the relationships that Hesselius draws between tea and spectral visions in the text, even the presence of this spiritualist German physician—with his mesmeric language of spectral fluids and blocked spiritual circulatory systems—is entirely appropriate. Hesselius invokes the whole history of green tea, with all of its imperial, Orientalist, and pseudo-scientific resonances. In doing so, his diagnosis enables us to infer three key features of indigestible ecologies: first, that food waste accrues, perhaps irreversibly; second, that food waste moves freely between digestive systems, nervous systems, and spiritual systems; third, that the haunting, whether a true supernatural phenomenon or a chemically-induced hallucination, is an emblem of the underlying and complex ecologies that were always present but to which Jennings became vulnerable once aware of them.

Food offers rich analytical inroads into imagining waste as part of an ecology. Digestion, as we see, involves complex material interactions that yield one type of what we describe as waste. When this chapter refers to the indigestible as a type of food waste, however—especially in the context of “Green Tea”—it considers that waste as rebellious matter that can be ingested and yet resists being fully incorporated into the consuming body. The indigestible is not a passive substance that gets broken down and nourishes a digestive system; rather, it permeates, reconfigures, and transforms that system. A food studies approach to “Green Tea” also enables us to explore the many and imaginative connections that Victorians drew between food and the occult. Food, for instance, was the

basis for rationalist denials of spiritual phenomena. The late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries witnessed “a remarkable cluster of scientific and philosophical anti-apparition writings” which dismissed alleged ghost-sightings as symptoms of dyspepsia (Castle 171). Dickens references this anti-spiritualist movement in *A Christmas Carol*, when Scrooge stubbornly insists to Marley’s ghost that “[t]here’s more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!” (52). This empiricist counterargument clung to nineteenth-century ghost stories, whether to be dismissed or playfully admitted, so much so as to become one of the genre’s foremost conventions. Another, parallel belief held food as a revelatory substance—as the causeway that grants humans access to the parallel spiritual world. Whether or not the connections between food and spiritualism were extensions of Enlightenment rationalism, both views invested food with a primacy within the broader domain of the supernatural or the occult. If ghost sightings were the result of some physiological weakness or disruption in the body—particularly as a result of faulty digestion—then what one eats could not only determine the condition of the body and of the mind, but also of the soul.

Food is connected to the supernatural for Jennings, who tries to use food to benefit from the connectedness of the body and of the mind during his study of ancient paganism. In keeping with the belief that food impacts the mind as much as the body, Jennings experiments on his own body and mind by drinking green tea. He claims that anyone who writes a large intellectual work necessarily fuels the process by ingesting certain stimulating foods:

I believe that every one who sets about writing in earnest does his work, as a friend of mine phrased it, *on* something—tea, or coffee, or tobacco. I suppose there is a material waste that must be hourly supplied in such occupations, or that we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded often of the connection by actual sensation. At all events, I felt the want, and I supplied it.  
(22)

Jennings’s explanation simultaneously acknowledges and resists the connectedness of the body and the mind. On the one hand, Jennings’s belief that food can determine certain states of body and mind relies on the connectedness between that body and mind to begin

with. On the other hand, this connection can evidently be compromised if the mind requires reminding of its connection to the body through “a material waste that must be hourly supplied” and “by actual sensation.” Though Jennings evidently believes he is supporting the connectedness of the mind and body, what he effectively proposes to achieve in drinking green tea is to fully detach and to thereby maximize the efficiency of the tasks performed by each. He suggests that it is necessary to use the body to make waste in order to avoid wasting the mind; physical digestion (the process of making “material waste”) prevents a wasteful form of mental digestion where “the mind, as it were, [would] pass out of the body” (22). Jennings’s self-inflicted experiments come from his recognition of the transformative capacity of food. This recognition, in turn, leads him to try to separate the waste-making processes of the body from the intellectual processes of the mind.

And yet, as the events of the story prove, the material relations into which he has wandered are more complex than Jennings realizes. “Green Tea” remains ambiguous as to the exact cause of his visitations. In spite of its title, the text does not establish Jennings’s tea-drinking habit as the cause; the apparitions are as likely to result from the clergyman’s studies of paganism than from his diet. Jennings tries to use food to deny the embodied nature of intellectual work and spiritual phenomena. He tries to reverse what he has begun and gives up green tea in a vain hope of curing what he frantically hopes is a mere “symptom of nervous dyspepsia” (26). Ultimately, this attempt proves futile, as well as indicative; the text stages an ecology of events instead of linear, logically sequenced events. The ecological structure of the text’s spiritual phenomenon might explain Hesselius’s inadequate postmortem diagnosis of Jennings’s case. A number of Le Fanu scholars have remarked upon this shortcoming of the ending, observing that Hesselius’s explanation is superficial at best and a sign of his dehumanizing perspective at worst.<sup>32</sup> The narrative problem becomes clearer when we consider that Hesselius looks

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<sup>32</sup> According to Cadwallader, Le Fanu uses Hesselius to problematize the doctor-patient relationship, highlighting his “inability to comprehend the totality of human experience,” as well as “the failings of the new psychological/physiognomic approach to medicine” too apt to classify the inexplicable as the products of a compromised sensorium (44).

for a linear and physiological explanation for complex events so far beyond his understanding that the investigator-like physician is somewhat parodied for his shortsightedness.

Jane Bennett devotes a chapter of *Vibrant Matter* to the mutually transformative relations that exist between humans and food. Bennett notes how these relations were particularly interesting to Western thinkers in the nineteenth-century, and how, at the time, “it was fairly easy find a philosopher who believed that food had the power to shape the dispositions of persons and nations” (43). For Bennett, these thinkers acknowledge “a profound reciprocity between eater and eaten” (43), or an understanding of food as an actant alongside human beings and according to which the ingestion and digestion of food are “conative bodies vying alongside and within another complex body (a person’s ‘own’ body)” (39). Reading a selection of prose works by Friedrich Nietzsche and Henry David Thoreau, Bennett argues that these philosophers:

discern a productive power intrinsic to foodstuff, which enables edible matter to coarsen or refine the imagination or render a disposition more or less liable to resentment, depression, hyperactivity, dull-wittedness, or violence. They experience eating as the formation of an assemblage of human and nonhuman elements, all of which bear some agentic capacity. This capacity includes the negative power to resist or obstruct human projects, but it also includes the more active power to affect and create effects. On this model of eating, human and nonhuman bodies recorporealize in response to each other; both exercise formative power and both offer themselves as matter to be acted on. Eating appears as a series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and outside becomes blurry: my meal both is and is not mine; you both are and are not what you eat. (Bennett 48-49)

For Bennett, this interaction of two mutually transforming material bodies figures eating as a process of shifting, collapsing boundaries. With a methodology grounded in actor-network theory, Bennett meditates upon food’s “agentic capacity” to initiate any number of psychological or physiological responses in the human body as it is being consumed and digested by that body. Food, in other words, transforms the human body by which it is transformed. Bennett’s work suggests, therefore, that, though ingested by a human

body, food is ultimately ambiguous in its effects—neither entirely passive nor entirely dominant.

Reading for the permeability that exists between the human body and non-human food, as Bennett might, infuses some of Jennings's remarks on his tea-drinking habit with new significance. This notion of mutually transformative "bodies" explains why Jennings might take green tea to "refine the imagination," when writing an intellectual work. The same green tea has also rendered his disposition liable to "ressentiment, depression, hyperactivity, dull-wittedness, or violence," as Bennett would suggest, or "hereditary suicidal mania," as Hesselius does suggest (40). In this text, both Jennings and Hesselius underestimate the complexities of eating food. The physiological and the spiritual are coexistent ecologies that collide together by an act of ingestion. Ingesting food has made Jennings's monkey demon accessible on the physiological levels of sight and sound. Rather than growing "too abstract," as he fears, Jennings's tea-drinking habit completes a collapse between his physiological and spiritual perception. With the collapse of the physiological and the spiritual, a new ecology develops on the site of Jennings's body. Food is not the interaction of a subject and an object, but rather the collision of two complex ecologies whose relations become radically interpenetrated, and this larger expanse of relations comes into play when Jennings takes green tea.

This perspective yields two possible readings of Jennings's suicide, then. The first is that Jennings, accepting the connectivity of the physiological and spiritual, curtails his material existence in order to end his new spiritual one. The second is that Jennings's suicide is proof of the persuasive domination of the monkey demon, which convinces him to fully abandon the physical and effect a total separation of his mind and body. This latter reading makes Jennings's early concerns about the condition of his mind and body ironic; he achieves the very separation that he sought to avoid through green tea. Jennings's impulse to parse the processes of his mind and of his body, and to do so by supplying himself with excess material, has fatal consequences. He has grasped the mutually transformative relations between food, the body, and the mind, but without understanding that his experiment would also have consequences for the spiritual plane to which he gains access. As the story develops and as we realize the full extent of

Jennings's circumstances, the maxim that food affects both body and mind is slightly revised: food's effects on the body and the mind can have spiritual consequences. While Bennett's approach to "edible matter" offers a useful foundation for theorizing the material relations involved between humans and their food, her chapter focuses on the ontological porousness of the two and consequently misses some opportunities to apprehend the latent power dynamic embedded in these material relations. He similarly does not understand his own choice to settle on drinking green tea; he simply "felt the want, and . . . supplied it." He has only a provisional theory as to why a writer might need to take a physical stimulant: even here, however, he defers to what seems a flippant remark made by a friend—the necessity of being "*on* something" while writing any difficult work. By examining the material relations between Jennings's mind, body, and food, we may begin to understand the limitations that lead Jennings to despair. Jennings cannot and does not realize the extent to which his mind, body, and the food that he so indifferently consumes can be mutually constitutive.

"Green Tea" develops a sense of ambiguity surrounding practices of consumption. The text refuses to confirm a single root cause of what happens to Jennings one way or another; we receive no absolute conclusion as to whether the monkey appears as the result of faulty digestion, of withdrawal, or of an excess of green tea. What we may say with more certainty, however, is that Jennings's condition is not purely psychoactive; it does not depend on his ingestion of a particular substance for its continuance, since quitting his green tea habit does not effect a corresponding cessation of the monkey's visitations. The irrevocable nature of Jennings's predicament recalls Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll—more, perhaps, than it does De Quincey's experience with opium; Jekyll's fatal mistake is to treat the contaminated salts that transform him into Mr. Hyde as though the process was psychoactive, reversible, impermanent. If green tea is involved in Jennings's revelation, that involvement is as a sacramental food. Rather than initiating an individual's transformation, green tea engages Jennings with an unconsidered, extant spiritual environment. Mr. Hyde is one strange instance of the monstrous in an otherwise unchanged London. By contrast, Jennings is a scholar whose mind and body become instantiated into a monstrous ecology.

Notwithstanding the sometimes humorously presumptuous deductions that Hesselius draws from Jennings's case, the doctor's diagnosis does show some recognition that the spheres of Jennings's experience are interrelated. In contrast to Jennings's divisive approach to food, mind, and body, Hesselius views the three as a triage of intermingled material players that, in certain combinations, causes the human to access (or be vulnerable to) the spiritual. For Hesselius, the mind is as much a material substance in its own right as are food and the body. As he reminds us, the mind resides in the nervous or spiritual fluid produced by the brain and is "not immaterial, any more than, as I before remarked, light or electricity are so" (39). Hesselius's proposed solution, though vague, is reliant on the material: he claims that "acting steadily upon the body" would have cured the symptoms that drove Jennings to despair (39). He compares Jennings's experience to a parallel case that presumably happened to the addressee of his narrative, Professor Van Loo of Leyden. He begs the professor to "remember how effectually [he] dissipated [Van Loo's] pictures by the simple application of iced eau-de-cologne" (39). The reasoning behind this solution is only slightly different from that of his patient. Jennings takes green tea on the supposition that the best way to enhance the mind is to operate through the body, and Hesselius believes that the best way to cure Jennings of his spiritual vision is also through the body. Rather than viewing green tea as an enhancer of physiological ability, however, Hesselius refers to green tea as something closer to a psychical toxin.

Chen offers a theoretical model suited for reading Jennings's predicament as a response to a toxin. In her 2012 monograph, *Animacies*, Chen defines toxicity as the commingling of two material bodies. Under what Chen identifies as "a basic semantic schema for toxicity" that emerges out of several examples, one body is under threat of damage, death, or alteration by the other (191). Hesselius's clinical assessment of chemical "abuses, of which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one," contains echoes of Chen's schema (39). Jennings's body is altered by a supposedly toxic agent (green tea), which causes "the over-action of the cerebral heart" and "prodigious nervous congestions" (39). Toxicity encompasses a latent power dynamic; and, indeed, there are important racial and nationalistic implications underlying this portrait of a white imperialist body threatened by a product of colonialism, which will be examined more closely later in this chapter. For now, we will simply bear in mind Chen's reminder that



“Toxicity’s ‘first’ (under threat) and ‘second’ (threatening) bodies are thus in the eye of the beholder” (191). Though Hesselius does not actually apply the term “toxic,” or its variants, to green tea, his description of its effects echoes the semantic schema of toxicity. Habitual green tea-drinking is one of “various abuses” that can disturb the “equilibrium” between the brain and an inner spiritual vision, causing that brain to be “unduly exposed” to “disembodied spirits” (39). This language of chemical violence, imbalance, and vulnerability effectively casts green tea as a toxin that threatens and operates upon the body.

The semantic schema of toxicity acknowledges the power dynamic latent in the human body’s absorption of external substances, whether or not that intake is voluntary. According to Chen, toxicity reverses the typical allocation of subject and object positions, where the subject is the animate human and the object is passive inanimate matter. Instead, this reversal emerges from the subject-like agency of the inanimate toxin and the object-like animate human body’s passive receptivity to that toxin:

By its very definition, the toxin, as much as it may have been categorized as inanimate, is more than mere matter, for it has a potency that can directly implicate the vulnerability of a living body. Prototypically, a toxin requires an object against which its threat operates. This threatened object is an object whose defenses will be put to the test, in detection, in “fighting off,” and finally in submission and absorption. But some confusion occurs when we note that the object of toxicity, its target, is an animate one—and hence potentially also a kind of subject—and that the toxin, the subject of toxicity, is inanimate.  
(203)

Here, Chen’s schema of toxicity does not reflect the equal standing implied by Bennett’s interpretation of ingestion as a “profound reciprocity between eater and eaten” or by any mutually constitutive relationship between parallel actants (Bennett 43). Rather, toxicity manifests an unequal distribution of power. It is the potency or the greater power of the toxin that determines the toxin’s subjecthood, as well as the objecthood of the living body under threat. Hesselius therefore invests green tea with material agency in rhetorically situating it as a toxin.

Ultimately, Bennett's and Chen's theories only extend the present discussion so far; the approaches of vibrant matter and animacies rely, however reluctantly, on subject-object relations in spite of their striving to resist the limitations of that binary. Chen's discussion of toxicity loses some of its impact when taken out of the context of twenty-first century biopolitics. Applied to nineteenth century imperialism, toxicity more or less reiterates the central concerns of the Imperial Gothic, wherein the colonized returns to transform (and to degrade, often into bestiality) the body of the colonizer. As Hesselius describes his studies of the various fluid systems connected to both the human body and spirit, his language evokes a sense of the interconnectedness and complex relations between material and spiritual that comes closest to resembling an ecology. The degree to which material and immaterial parts are connected within this ecology make it possible for such insignificant events like Jennings's drinking green tea to have profound and devastating consequences. Moreover, this interconnectedness also confuses causal relationships. It may well be that Jennings's experiences are caused by green tea and it may not; the text denies any narrative closure of the kind found in mystery fiction and which posits a final master narrative of causes and effects.

One difficulty of describing the new material ecologies of the indigestible stems from the implicitly hierarchical discourses surrounding human engagement with food. The word "food" is itself predicated upon the anthropocentric functions of food. The *OED*'s first definition of food classifies the word under the heading, "Nourishment" ("food," I.), before more specific variations emerge, including the familiar definition of food as "Any nutritious substance that people or animals eat or drink in order to maintain life and growth; nourishment, provisions" ("food," def. 1.a.). From a linguistic standpoint, it seems impossible to avoid relegating food to a subordinate position relative to the human eater. We necessarily refer to food by its utility in providing sustenance to the human body. Even Bennett is limited by using the term "edible matter," which still casts food as an object-for-consumption. There are also further problems as to the variable matter that food encompasses; food can be solid or liquid, living or nonliving, material or abstract (in the figurative sense of "providing spiritual, emotional, or mental sustenance" [*OED*, "food," 2.a.]), all depending on the nutritive needs of the food consumer. Yet, it is still possible to nuance our conceptions of food, these limits of language and classification

notwithstanding. If our vocabulary of food is incomplete, we may still reimagine the material terms on which food and humans interact. Thinking through food ecologies is to imagine ingestion as the interaction between two complex ecologies, between the food and the biota of the human body. Food, whatever its form, is already enmeshed in and composed of ecologies, whether in the sense of the dynamic relations of growth, consumption, digestion, and decomposition surrounding that which can be considered food, or of the communities of microscopic bacteria living symbiotically on complex organisms and upon which bacteria complex organisms rely for survival. Another example is Jennings's "material waste," which signifies both an excess and a diminishment—consuming a material resource to excess, and the wasting away of Jennings's body and mind as he attempts to digest that which turns out to be indigestible. The term "ecology" is therefore useful here for bringing with it more discursive flexibility than the terms of subject and object, from which even new materialisms theorists like Bennett and Chen who work to dismantle such binaries have trouble disentangling themselves.

Before we can further parse Jennings's entanglement with the indigestible, it is necessary to first pause and consider what exactly constitutes the digestible within such a nebulous imagination of a literary food ecology. If ingestion involves a collision of food ecologies, digestion suggests a relation in which one ecology would be disintegrated, subsumed, and absorbed by the other. The consuming ecology, then, would be strengthened, enlarged, and nourished by the digested ecology. The logic of digestion is a logic of dominance that necessitates hierarchical relations. One limitation of Bennett's conception of edible matter is its presumption of the equanimity between the actants or conative bodies involved. This equanimity of material bodies cannot be said of the food relations in Le Fanu's text. If we imagined the process of eating as Bennett might, as the interaction of equal material parts, then the resulting ecology of relations would exhibit actants without momentum, conflicts, tension, or shifts of power—none of the components, in short, that are necessary to the narrative. Continuing this relational logic of digestion between ecologies, then, indigestion would imply a relation of failed absorption, where the consuming ecology manages neither to break down or to nourish itself by the ecology with which it has engaged. The food ecology of "Green Tea" centres on the ingestion of a

food item that Jennings had intended to absorb—to assimilate within the machinations of his body during his production of intellectual labour. This green tea resists such absorption and comes back to haunt its consumer, in a Gothic return of a substance that was only partially integrated—ingested but unsuccessfully digested. In this way, the story of the green tea and Jennings is a story of the indigestible. That which ought to have been broken down, consumed, digested instead returns in a more powerful and destructive form. Whether or not from a hereditary predisposition to suicide, Jennings is powerless against his demonic pursuer and destroys himself at its bidding.

When we view the characters and events of “Green Tea” through the lens of food ecologies, the text shifts from being a tangle of competing and contradictory resonances to an ecology of overdetermined phenomena—an ecology of the indigestible. The monkey suggests a multitude of ideas: when Jennings first realizes that his umbrella easily passes through the monkey “without the slightest resistance” (24), it is a ghostly apparition that evokes nineteenth-century spiritualism and the occult; when he finds that in total darkness it is “*all* visible distinctly in a halo that resembles a glow of red embers” (27), lit as if by a glory, it becomes a confused symbol of alternately satanic or pagan power; when the monkey “exhibit[s] an atrocious determination to thwart” (29) the Reverend’s religious duties, an allegory of compromised religious devotion rendered through the lens of Victorian medievalism; the choice of a small black monkey in itself could serve as a subtle invocation of nineteenth-century evolutionary discourse, or even the social Darwinism that would eventually evolve into the eugenics movement. This ecology of the indigestible is an emergent, multifaceted phenomenon. The primary horror of this tale is not the existence of a spiritual dimension in itself, but rather what could happen to us if like Jennings we had a channel of access to it—if what we experience as two discrete environments collided together. The monkey demon offers a glimpse of a dimension to which we do not and would not desire to have access. It is an environment that rides on the material relations at play within indigestion, including the occult and, as we shall see in the next section, the imperial.

There is a further dimension to the horror of food or of the indigestible that has significant materialist consequences. While for Bennett the physical dynamic between

human bodies and food is ambiguous, and for Chen that dynamic is an embodied power relation, “Green Tea” expresses a horror of the productive, generative quality of food. Jennings takes green tea so that it might create certain effects conducive to his studies, but the tea is too effective. We have already seen how he takes “a little green tea” for its mentally stimulating effects—or for the way that it “cleared and intensified the power of thought” (22). Afterward, when the monkey appears and Jennings narrates the impression that these appearances produce, what he describes is an amplified version of the effect that he sought in drinking green tea:

There is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one’s attention to that monotony, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing—and unless I had started up, and shook off the catalepsy I have felt as if my mind were on the point of losing itself. (30)

The narrow, contracted attention is an extreme of the sustained scholarly focus that he sought to maintain while writing. The green tea, in other words, heightens Jennings’s perceptions to the extent that, as Hesselius later describes it, his mind becomes “unduly exposed” to the communications of “disembodied spirits” (39). The tea is altogether too successful and exceeds the will of the body that consumes it.

Having thus become vulnerable, Jennings’s hauntings follow the same method by which he increased the strength of his tea, moving from stronger brews of black tea to multiple kettles of green tea. Occasionally, the monkey would disappear for a few weeks, only to return more imposing and imbued with a “new energy” (27). Like Jennings’s gradual strengthening of his tea, the monkey’s increased aggression also occurs in stages: first, “in an increased vivacity, and an air of menace” (27); later, in an “intense and increasing fury, whenever [he] said [his] prayers, or even meditated prayer” and which culminates eventually in “a dreadful interruption” (30). Both the green tea and the spectral monkey follow parallel patterns of intensification, with the latter occurring immediately after the former. Through this excess efficacy, green tea becomes the waste that immerses Jennings irrevocably into an ecology of its own.

Jennings becomes entangled in this new waste ecology as if he were entering a new social relationship. “Tea was my companion” (22), he explains, casting the substance as an animate fellow creature whose presence he believes will offer some source of vitality during his solitary studies. The term “companion” here connotes the comfort offered by a friend, or even a pet; it evokes the same possibility of emotional fulfillment, as well as a similar demand upon one’s services (whether socially, as a caretaker, or as the one who prepares the food). In addition to the comfort of intimacy, however, companionship also suggests constant presence or attendance, and that presence becomes a burden as it does for Jennings when he realizes that it never entirely goes away. Jennings reports being riveted by an “irrepressible uneasiness as to its movements” and constantly tracking its behaviour so as to notice that “[i]n all situations, at all hours, it is awake and looking at me. That never changes” (26). “Companion” is, in other words, a loaded term in “Green Tea.” Le Fanu loosely applies the term to the green tea, to the monkey (chapter six is titled, “How Mr Jennings Met His Companion” [21]), and to Jennings himself (as Hesselius remarks, “He has read, travelled, and thought, and having also suffered, he ought to be an accomplished companion” [11]). This language of companionship marks Jennings’s absorption into a new ecology centring on his spectral companion and to the diminishment of all of his other social and spiritual connections. The green tea’s or the monkey’s constant attendance supplants all of Jennings’s other existing or potential relationships. Green tea, as Lady Mary admits, was a source of disagreement between her and Jennings. The monkey’s constant presence and interruptions force Jennings to give up his vicarage. Ultimately, Jennings’s consumption of green tea effects and alters his social possibilities, as a new and unwise acquaintanceship might. Jennings is prepared for green tea’s stimulating capacity but not for its long-term efficacy and its constant companionship.

The impurities of green tea and their effect on Jennings’s spiritual system long overstay their welcome. The efficacy of the green tea is such that it continues even after Jennings stops drinking it. On the night of the monkey’s first appearance, Jennings claims that he “drank no tea that night” (26). A common acquaintance, Lady Mary, also confirms to Hesselius that, though “Green tea was a subject on which [they] used almost to quarrel,” Jennings has “quite given that up” (11). Nevertheless, Jennings cannot escape his

condition or disengage from the new perceptions to which the tea has exposed him. This sense of a potent impurity, long stored within the body and subtly active, parallels a memorable anecdote that initiates Stacy Alaimo's discussions of trans-corporeality.<sup>33</sup> In a now famous account of toxicity, the new materialist thinker describes her realization that her body had unwittingly contacted and ingested heavy metals. She describes a campaign against mercury that measured the toxicity found in volunteers' hair:

Such an action renders palpable one's own corporeal connection to global economic, industrial, and environmental systems. . . Someone who participated in this campaign may well have considered how her own body was literally enmeshed within the wider world. When I received my results, I imagined various routes that mercury may have taken to my body (tuna sandwiches in childhood? Dallas air pollution?). (19-20)

Alaimo's narrative recounts a newfound hyper-awareness of her body's material interactions that would most likely be eerily familiar for Jennings and, indeed, Le Fanu's readers. As I describe in the final section of this chapter, Jennings's latent and unfiltered impurity enmeshes him in a global ecology that is similarly economic, but also occult and imperial. Reading Alaimo's trans-corporeal epiphany alongside Le Fanu's text can reveal the implied anxiety in her account. Beyond the recognition of her enmeshment is a discomfort with the lingering effects of material relations with no single clear cause. Moreover, the toxicology results betray the body's unexpectedly ineffective filtration system when weighed against an unexpectedly effective impurity. Again, the good vicar might find these impressions familiar.

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<sup>33</sup> Alaimo uses trans-corporeality as a form of critical engagement that mirrors Morton's understanding of *the mesh*. Alaimo writes: "[i]magining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2). For Alaimo, this enmeshment de-centres the human subject amid an environment of systems, relations, and connections. While I invoke these relations using a parallel term—the indigestible—this emphasis on the "more-than-human" seems particularly pertinent to Le Fanu's text, which envisions a more-than-human, more-than-material ecology emerging from waste.

The green tea of Le Fanu's text is not only remarkable for these enduring and vigorous effects. It also enjoys a certain structural ambiguity, which allows it to permeate system to system, whether digestive, circulatory, sensory, or spiritual. When Jennings experiments upon his own mind and body using green tea, he appears to recognize that these discrete systems are connected. He takes green tea under the belief that "there is a material waste that should be hourly supplied" (22) in occupations such as writing or else "we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded of the connection by actual sensation" (22), he appears to recognize the interconnectedness of these systems to some extent. However, he is not prepared for the full implications of his own embodiment when thus experimenting upon himself. The green tea, with its totalizing influence over his body, forces him into a hyper-sensitized version of that embodiment that only ends with the self-destruction of that body.

Finally, green tea is generative in the sense that it produces a seemingly spiritual phenomenon. The ultimate irony of Jennings's demise is that he received precisely what he wished for—the opportunity to study minutely the phenomena that both Jennings and Hesselius associate with "the actual religion of educated and thinking paganism" (21). The dark joke of this text is that it grants Jennings the immersion in his subject of study that he was seeking, along with the destructive consequences that he did not anticipate. These destructive consequences stem from the unexpected agency of the material substance with which Jennings engages as a food. Jennings expresses his helplessness in the face of such power when he despairs of all possibility of escaping the spectral monkey by an effort of will: "it is gaining such an influence over me: it orders me about, it is such a tyrant, and I'm growing so helpless" (32). He goes on to explain that: "while I pray with my eyes closed, it comes closer and closer, and I see it. I know it is not to be accounted for physically, but I do actually see it, though my lids are closed, and so it rocks my mind, as it were, and overpowers me, and I am obliged to rise from my knees" (30). Whether by the monkey or the green tea, Jennings is mentally and physically overpowered. As an active material agent within Jennings's body, the green tea of the text is a fictionalized version of what Bennett and Chen saw in both edible matter and toxins.



Jennings's feelings of horror grow out of his awareness that he is now compelled to use his new senses: he sees the monkey in daylight or darkness, whether his eyes are closed or open; he is driven to desperation because its movements rivet and then disperse his attention, or "contract one's attention to that monotony [of its motion], till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing" (30). The strength of Jennings's horror lies to a considerable degree in the unexpected and inexplicable complexity of his sensory experience. That he tries to classify his visions as "purely disease" (25), without once believing his condition to be any other than a "satanic captivity" (26), shows his desperate desire to cling to a purely physiological sensorium. He is not alone in this. In her 2016 discussion of "Green Tea," Cadwallader points to "Doctor Hesselius's inability to comprehend the totality of human experience. While he repeatedly claims to believe in the supernatural, he treats his patients' encounters with it not as spiritual experiences but as evidence of a deranged sensorium" (44). While this is certainly true, Hesselius himself has a limited understanding of the interactions and interrelations behind Jennings's experiences, as I discuss in the next section. He prescribes for Jennings's spiritual malaise, or even cursed existence, an incongruously dainty material commodity. Cadwallader's remark is that Hesselius has no spiritual treatment to weigh against spiritual disturbance. However, while Jennings's experience may not arise out of a deranged sensorium, the monkey and its ecology of connections work to derange his sensibility. It would be inaccurate to say that Jennings's haunting operates through some of his physiological senses and not others because he perceives the monkey through senses that are grounded in but also detached from his ordinary physiological vision and hearing. The monkey violates ocular principles, perfectly visible in both daylight and darkness by means of "a halo that resembles the glow of red embers, and which accompanies it in all its movements" (27). When the monkey begins speaking to him, its voice has "a peculiarity" (31); just as Jennings sees the monkey with a secondary, inner vision, he also hears the monkey through a secondary sense of hearing. As Jennings says, the creature's voice "is not like the tone of a human voice. It is not by my ears it reaches me—it comes like a singing through my head" (31). It is therefore less that his sensory experience is inconsistent, but rather that this experience is apprehended through senses that seem a ghostly echo of his normal physiological senses.

### 3.2

When Hesselius recounts his first shock on hearing of Jennings's suicide, he wanders into a meditation on the unlikely connections that exist between binary opposites:

It is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyzes the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior. Thus we find strange bedfellows, and the mortal and immortal prematurely make acquaintance. (37)

The way in which the waste ecologies at play in Le Fanu's story are capable of intertwining such seeming contradictions as the material and the spiritual recalls the tale of Saint Dominic as I laid it out in the introduction to this chapter. The hagiographical legend offers a whimsical, even folkloric collapse of the spiritual and the material; its humour lies in Saint Dominic's talent for combating, in strictly physical terms, a spiritual threat made manifest. Rather than banish his devilish distraction, the saint reduces Satan to a lamp; rather than recoil from or become annoyed with the fiendish flea on his page, he marks his spot with a bug-splat. This flux between apparently contradictory categories—material and spiritual, “mortal and immortal” (37)—recurs in Le Fanu's parallel narrative, where physical symptoms and spiritual distress, dietary choices, hobbies, and Christian despair all seem connected. Hesselius's iced eau-de-cologne remedy is as ridiculous as Saint Dominic's playful resolution of his own troubles. Such a mundane solution, however, appears inadequate next to the tangled web of “spirit and nerve” in which Jennings is involved, especially given both the complex cultural associations around the monkey and the violent physical consequences of its manifestations.

In the previous section I examined the indigestible nature of a form of spiritual waste, left behind by Jennings's compulsive and wanton consumption of imported tea. Here, I trace the ecologies of associative meanings into which this waste ushers Jennings—particularly the spectral associations between food consumption, learning, and anxieties toward the imperial other. The indigestible is, after all, hyper-productive, and not simply of physical interrelations and ironic dietary outcomes. The digestive ecologies that provide context

for Jennings's tea consumption parallel contemporary anxieties toward nineteenth-century cultural products and preoccupations, imports and occupations. The tale figures imported green tea as a poisonous form of the indigestible, lingering long after in the spiritual system of its victim. Occult paganism emerges in this story as a parallel form of the indigestible toward which Jennings is irrevocably drawn. It lingers in the history of Europe, on the margins of Empire, and it lurks in the corners of Jennings's eye. Like any imperial fear, it cannot be incorporated into English life and yet it permeates nonetheless to form its own complex relations. Where the previous section explores the indigestible on a literal level (green tea), this section explores the indigestible through layers of occulted associations (paganism). Just as the residue from Jennings's past tea abuse lies latent and unincorporated in his body, occult paganism throughout the story figures as a past residue still present and still unassimilated into Jennings's contemporary European context. And, although both sections share a parallel structure, they are also not discrete from one another; the text binds green tea and pagan occultism together within its broader, bewildering interrelations.

Jennings is not haunted in the usual way; he is not the target of a spiritual subject or agency. Rather, Jennings finds himself immersed in a new environment. As McCormack observes, "Le Fanu's world, even in the more mundane novels, is prepositional: relation holds it together *and* haunts it. A universe of nouns and verbs is replaced by a multiverse of prepositions, conjunctions, disjunctions" (McCormack 153). "Green Tea" depicts a multilingual scholar struggling to comprehend the grammar of his surroundings. From the time that he begins his work on paganism to the height of his harassment by the monkey demon, Jennings describes his experience as a way of living. This new environment, moreover, is the result of a catalytic reaction between Jennings's research and his ingestion of green tea—an emergent ecology of the material/physiological and of the spiritual/occult. Here, digestion and indigestion do not result from ingestion, but rather from Jennings's engagement with an ecology. Food moves between the physiological and the spiritual, initiating a new perceptual dimension that resides in Jennings and which collapses the spiritual and the material.

The waste ecology into which Jennings stumbles is a holistic environment that integrates food, religion, imperialism, and the occult. The text creates a sense of the expansive reach of this ecology when Jennings describes his own research as a state of mind that redefines the spaces that he occupies. “I was always thinking on the subject,” he explains, “walking about, wherever I was, everywhere” (21). This holistic quality, or what Jennings refers to as an “essential unity” (21), is what he finds unwholesome and implicitly fascinating about studying paganism. In this same passage he remarks that he has been “thoroughly infected” (21) by his new studies, depicting the topic’s resistance to scholarly objectivity as contamination. While this image speaks more to contagion and to contact than to consumption, it evokes the same sense of bodily permeability as well as Jennings’s ambiguous sense that the spirit or intellect is itself a body, distinct and yet intricately connected to our corporeal form. Jennings is so fascinated by his “delightfully interesting” (22) work that he does not notice the degree to which it entangles him or the impossibility of extricating himself from that work hereafter. His narrative suggests that one cannot study paganism at arm’s length; one must live within and become subsumed by paganism. He has inadvertently fallen into a religious belief and practice that consume him.

Jennings lives in a particular state of mind, which in turn alters and reshapes his engagement with his surroundings. Unlike Saint Dominic, Jennings cannot perform his religious work specifically because of his interactions with the spiritual world. While Saint Dominic commands his spiritual environment, Jennings falls to its commands. As Jennings begins this transition into a new way of life, he develops a new habit of drinking tea. As he believes, this habit is the physiological counterpart to his mental exertions. Jennings “felt the want, and [he] supplied it” (22). Mental stimulation must have a corresponding physical stimulus, lest the mind lose its connection to the body. Jennings therefore imbibes and is habituated to drinking green tea in the same way that he imbibes and is infused with this holistic knowledge. The food item in this case—the green tea—is aligned carefully with Jennings’s engagement with an environment of his own making. Green tea is not, then, an object to be digested; it is a component of what will soon become an unconsidered ecology. Indeed, it does not matter if green tea enables the studies that push Jennings toward the spiritual, or if in its impurity it provides a visionary

experience. As we shall see, green tea is as inextricably bound to paganism as are Jennings's occult studies.

As Jennings sits at his studies—surrounded by deep Turkish carpets and distracted from his Anglican ministry—his obsessive consumption of a product of empire evokes the nineteenth-century fascination with the Imperial Gothic. In the nineteenth-century imagination—particularly as it was expressed in anxious genre fiction—the Victorian Empire was a site of occulted interrelations and blurred significance. As Karen Macfarlane observes, the Imperial Gothic channels the era's preoccupation with “failures of classification and anxieties about the limits of knowledge” by writing them onto the Victorian individual, betraying “the mutable, unclassifiable body” (76). Le Fanu's “Green Tea” exhibits many of the late-Victorian epistemological anxieties that are clearly visible in tales of a plundered ancient Egypt, of the archeological Other, or of the imperial body lost to the colonies, all of which belong more recognizably to the Imperial Gothic. Of course, it is fairly straightforward to imagine the colonialist implications of “Green Tea.” The text can easily be—and indeed has already been—read as an imperialist nightmare in which a colonized object returns to colonize the unsuspecting imperial subject. Melissa Dickson, for instance, argues that the tea itself represents the tensions between its nationalization as an iconic food of British domesticity and imperial anxieties surrounding chemical dependency and racial Otherness (85). Though Dickson does not explore the Orientalist undercurrents of “Green Tea” beyond these observations, she pairs her claim with a brief reference to the quality of things that, as Elaine Freedgood has shown, carries the potential to “destabilise the boundaries between the material and the metaphysical” within a gothic text (Dickson 78). In other words, Dickson hints, however briefly, at the interesting material implications that this text has the potential to offer through a food item heavy with conflicting cultural tensions.

Green tea was an uncommon food product in Victorian Britain, and comprised a far smaller percentage of imported teas from China compared with black teas such as Ceylon

from colonial Hong Kong.<sup>34</sup> As a product that, unlike black tea, had not been appropriated to emblemize British nationhood and domesticity, green tea maintains its aura of Orientalism in Le Fanu's text. The mingled exoticism and threat of contamination is clear when Hesselius guesses that Jennings once drank green tea "extravagantly" (11), when Lady Mary admits that Jennings's controversial habit of taking "Green tea was a subject on which [they] used almost to quarrel" (11), and of course when Hesselius refers to this habit as one of many "abuses" of which to be wary (39). As the linchpin of the material and spiritual collapse in an ecology of indigestion, green tea is emblematic of colonial cultural products that refuse to be consumed—to be the product of careless British cosmopolitanism. These latent tensions surrounding the British Imperial tea trade might, therefore, also be extended to make room for a new materialisms reading.<sup>35</sup>

A new ecology emerges out of these intertwinings of food, studies, faith, and empire. As Bennett might observe, its emergent properties are unpredictable and uncontrolled. Jennings's involvement with food involves him with empire; his studies of ancient theology involve his capacity for belief. As these interrelate, they threaten his stable position as an embodied consumer in a Victorian context. His studies in metaphysical paganism—a nineteenth century euphemism for the occult—are bound to his physiological habit of ingesting green tea. From these parallel practices, his physical, mental, and perhaps even spiritual senses are at once heightened and intertwined. To adopt some of Hesselius's language, we might even explain the process as a kind of sensory exposure, the degree of which was much more extensive than Jennings was prepared for. This is how he creates and entangles himself in a new ecology of the

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<sup>34</sup> Fromer's *A Necessary Luxury* contains a detailed historical account of the British imperial tea trading industry, including the differences of cultural capital invested into black tea and green tea. The former was co-opted as an emblem of British domesticity, in stark contrast to the less known and more heavily Orientalized green tea.

<sup>35</sup> Chen's semantic schema of toxicity, for instance, is well-suited to examine the implications of rhetorically casting green tea, the subject, as a threat to Jennings's body, the object. The spectral monkey shows an increasing animation over the course of haunting Jennings. The monkey develops, in stages, an increasing physical animation, going from "surly languor" (27), to jumping on a lectern and squatting over an open Bible, to speaking "with a perfect coherence and articulation" (31). According to Jennings's description, the monkey gradually moves through what Chen would call "gradations of lifeliness" (167).

material and the spiritual, two sensory realms joined by the ingestion of food. Jennings explains the gradual worsening of his condition in terms we would normally associate with consumption:

For two years in my direful case that limitation prevailed.  
But as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought  
under the teeth, as the tip of the little finger caught in a mill  
crank will draw in the hand, and the arm, and the whole  
body, so the miserable mortal who has been once caught  
firmly by the end of the finest fibre of his nerve, is drawn in  
and in, by the enormous machinery of hell, until he is as I  
am. (31)

Jennings offers two analogies to his condition here: one of a person gradually ingesting food; and the other of one who becomes trapped into an inexorable mechanism to be ground like wheat grains into flour. Figuring himself, then, as both one who eats and one who will be eaten, Jennings's language takes on the contradictory classification of Macfarlane's reading of the Imperial Gothic. Jennings offers food consumption as the material parallel for his spiritual entrapment "by the enormous machinery of hell." Ingestion initiates the process of Jennings's predicament, and presents a vivid illustration of the predation of which he is victim.

While it is Jennings's addiction to green tea that often captures critical attention in this story, this passage figures his consumption of and consumption by knowledge and study of pagan theology as similarly obsessive. Pagan knowledge and stimulants that permit occult learning entwine in this impulsive, addictive, and self-destructive engagement. We can see this destabilizing of Jennings as an embodied consumer in the way that studying ancient European paganism connects him to imperial paganism. The text elides the distinctions between the ancient paganism that Jennings studies and the contemporary Victorian fascination with all things occult. These unruly categories emerge during Jennings's first encounter with the monkey on an omnibus:

I had observed in the corner opposite to me . . . two small  
circular reflections, as it seemed to me of a reddish light.  
They were about two inches apart, and about the size of  
those small brass buttons that yachting men used to put  
upon their jackets. I began to speculate, as listless men will,

upon this trifle, as it seemed. From what centre did that faint but deep red light come, and from what—glass beads, buttons, toy decorations—was it reflected? . . . I had not solved the puzzle, and it became in another minute more odd, for these two luminous points, with a sudden jerk, descended nearer the floor, keeping still their relative distance and horizontal position, and then, as suddenly, they rose to the level of the seat on which I was sitting, and I saw them no more.

‘My curiosity was now really excited, and, before I had time to think, I saw again these two dull lamps, again together near the floor; again they disappeared, and again in their old corner I saw them. (23)

Jennings notices the monkey in a careless, “listless” way, considering it a mere “trifle.” His early speculations grasp at the trivial, accordingly—light reflected by ephemera, or “glass beads, buttons, toy decorations.” Not realizing what he sees, Jennings treats the spectre as a game, an intellectual exercise, a “puzzle” to excite his “curiosity” and which requires “time to think.” This puzzle resists being known; it baffles him, becoming “more odd” by the minute. Jennings’s idleness is contrasted against the monkey, which shows the alacrity and awareness of a predator. Its movements—implied by its eyes dropping down slightly, jumping up onto the seat opposite Jennings, and reappearing at a distance in their original place—suggest strategic investigation through cautious advances and retreats. This monkey sizes up its prey carefully and deliberately, in spite of what Jennings says about its initial sullenness or languor.

Jennings’s trivial speculations link his behaviour to an imperialist stereotype of the manner and work ethic of colonized peoples. He is not the fearless and enterprising adventurer of Imperial Gothic novels. In this encounter, Jennings is oddly “listless,” idle, and even indolent—prejudicial terms that were pointedly applied to the Chinese labourers who worked for British colonial tea plantations; these descriptors fall within the broader discourse of racialized labour that Syed Hussein Alatas famously called the myth of the lazy native. In his interactions with the monkey, in other words, Jennings rehearses the mannerisms that imperialist discourses held to be intrinsic to the colonized. In doing so, Jennings falls into a holistic realm of dissolving and slippery categories in which not even



the imperialist's reductive distinctions between colonizer and colonized may be maintained.

This is how imperialism recurs in Le Fanu's tale. It weaves subtly into an ecology of relations that speak to colonial involvement. Beyond their most apparent emblems—imported tea and a tropical mammal—contemporary imperialist anxieties surface throughout the story as spectral impressions. Le Fanu's text is less a tale of overt imperialist language than it is one punctuated by subtle pulses of imperialist sensibility—racialized language, gothic exoticism, and fantasies of incursion. Jennings exists as an imperial contemporary, inextricably a man of his colonial time; not only does he exhibit an intellectual colonization of ancient paganism, but he also habituates himself to a thoughtless and avid consumption of a colonial product—green tea—in the service of that intellectual colonization. Jennings regularly takes green tea, having found that “it cleared and intensified the power of thought so” (22). As we have already seen, Jennings believes that the work of intellection demands that the scholar operate “*on* something” and that his chosen “companion” is tea (22). He begins with black tea, steadily increases its strength, and then moves on to green tea, presumably because the strongest black tea no longer answers his purposes. As with the black tea—and, indeed, as if he were beginning a course of medication—Jennings begins with a small dosage, with only “a little green tea,” until he is brewing kettles of tea two or three times during his final three hours of study before bed (22). He admits this to mean he took green tea “frequently,” but insists that his tea was “not stronger than one might take it for pleasure” (22). The process by which Jennings develops his tea-drinking habit follows the trajectory of encroachment—the same encroachment that he later uses as an analogy for his own case, when he describes being unaccountably “drawn in and in” just “as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought under the teeth” (31). Thus we find Jennings's acquisition of occult knowledge doubly imperial—imperial in its accumulation of knowledge that is other, and in its ingestion of an imperial product.

But in both cases, that which Jennings has consumed is indigestible. The green tea sits in his spiritual/mesmeric fluid while his occult, theological hobby seems to distract the clergyman. Each invigorates Jennings, but neither can be easily incorporated into the

ascetic Christian ideal of a figure like Saint Dominic. In coining the term “Imperial Gothic” in his 1988 book, *Rule of Darkness*, Patrick Brantlinger observes that:

Imperial Gothic expresses anxieties about the waning of religious orthodoxy, but even more clearly it expresses anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain’s imperial hegemony. The atavistic descents into the primitive experienced by fictional characters seem often to be allegories of the larger regressive movement of civilization, British progress transformed into British backsliding. (229)

“Green Tea” is particularly concerned with the “waning of religious orthodoxy.” The story reflects critically upon Jennings’s studies into paganism and upon their unwholesome influence on his “Christian mind” (21). For his part, Brantlinger identifies three primary motifs of the Imperial Gothic: “individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world” (230). It is further characteristic, he suggests, of many late Victorian Imperial Gothic stories for “occult phenomena [to] follow characters from imperial settings home to Britain” (231). Le Fanu’s text maps readily onto this schema of the Imperial Gothic. Jennings treats of his own condition as one such regression into the so-called primitive, situating his studies of ancient pagan metaphysics as he does as beautiful and yet unwholesome for “the Christian mind” (21). Dickson argues that the spectral monkey parallels other Victorian texts that racialize primates as colonial Others. If the colonial returns to haunt Jennings, it does so in the form of a demonic black monkey—a Darwinian nightmare of the primitive, an occult event overturning the evidence of science, and a heavily racialized emblem of the regression of a white British imperial body. “Green Tea,” in other words, stages Brantlinger’s Imperial Gothic in its depictions of both the decline of religious orthodoxy and Victorian anxieties surrounding the colonial Other, racialized bodies, and eugenic regression.

Brantlinger’s schema for the Imperial Gothic genre implies two canonical possibilities. First, the narrative of an imperial adventurer who leaves England and is defeated,

overcome, or irrevocably altered by the occult forces of the land he was sent to conquer; second, the narrative of colonial penetration into the heart of empire, often a curse brought back to England by some globe-trotter. This broad category of texts—which might range from H. Rider Haggard’s adventure novels, to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), and to H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895)—often depict unsuspecting British imperialists who wander into and are irrevocably altered by a given colonial landscape. Le Fanu’s imperial landscape, however, is an England whose worldly involvement realizes a spiritual malaise. Indeed, the story seems to waver between these two possibilities. It is the tale of an explorer into an obscure pagan past, lost ultimately to his revelations. At once, it is an account of an imported impurity, which curses the moral heart of a God-fearing empire – an emblematic Anglican minister. Each reading is complicated by the ecology of the indigestible that emerges out of Jennings’s green tea habit. Jennings seems less to have returned from the borderlands of the British Empire, and more to have initiated a process that quickly grows into an ecology and which he himself is not equipped to survive. “Green Tea” sits uneasily between the two standard narratives of Imperial Gothic; it is a point of canonical collapse.

Local and ancient and, at once, foreign and current, paganism interrelates these two canons. When Jennings complains that the ancient paganism he studies is disturbingly holistic, he is more correct than he knows. Jennings’s studies pull Brantlinger’s two Imperial Gothic narratives—of the lost imperialist and of the colonial incursion—together in uneasy tension, not by virtue of his own work but by the ecological structure of paganism itself. The story imagines an underlying association between the two—between loss and incursion, between historic and foreign paganism. As an umbrella term for the occult, the spiritual, and the racialized, paganism is a suitably ambiguous concept to be at the centre of what Jennings calls “essential unity” (21). Green tea, monkeys, and spectres are all connected by their associative relations to paganism. Paganism functions as an ecology; it is at once the history of ancient European paganism that Jennings pursues, the sensory space that he is forced to explore, and the colonial presence that incurs—is imported, is ingested—into the heart of the empire. It is paganism that stands as a cultural artefact of ancient Europe and that in true gothic fashion has returned as the still indigestible other.

At the beginning of this section, I wrote of Jennings's experience as a new environment, one that revealed a spiritual involvement with the physical world. The space that Jennings opens up through his studies and his habits is imbued with political and theological associations, combined into the "essential unity" (21) of an ecology revealed through the indigestible. The omnibus scene marks Jennings's first indication that he has been enmeshed in this new ecology—his first exposure to the consequences of both his tea-drinking and his studies. His horror upon moving his umbrella "towards it . . . up to it—*through* it!" (23-24) is an epistemological horror; Jennings cannot comprehend the new terrain, nor its spiritual incursions. Worse, he cannot comprehend its fundamental connection, and this will be his undoing. When Jennings returns home from the omnibus with his new companion following beside, he decides to stop his habitual green tea usage: "My idea was that I should act upon my material system, and by living for a while in sensation apart from thought, send myself forcibly, as it were, into a new groove" (26). He tries to comfort himself with the judgments of his intellectual contemporaries, who might attribute these events to "physical affection," "sitting up too late," and his "digestion" (25), though knowing even then that it was a fruitless exercise and a weak attempt at "bullying [him]self into a false courage" (26).

Jennings decides that evening to abandon his occult studies as well but these are not so easily forsaken. When Jennings first meets Hesselius, he eagerly asks after the doctor's monograph "*Essays on Metaphysical Medicine*," a long-out-of-print text that he has not read for twelve years (9). The two occultists discuss the strange way some books have of lingering in the mind and returning unbidden: "[t]hose revivals of interest in a subject happen to me often; one book suggests another, and often sends me back a wild-goose chase over an interval of twenty years" (10). Just as Jennings cannot filter the impure, indigestible waste left behind by green tea from his spiritual system, neither man can seem to filter pagan study from their minds. Nor can they seem, ultimately, to control the strange connections it makes with new knowing. Pagan understanding lingers, still hyper-productive, still potent, and, it seems, still tempting. When Hesselius calls upon Jennings in the coming days, he finds a luxurious, complete set of the first edition of Swedenborg's metaphysical writings and visionary descriptions. Jennings has been able to quit his tea habit but his interest in the arcane, the occult, and the metaphysical cannot

be so easily dismissed. It recurs insidiously in his attempts to contextualize his visions through Hesselius's metaphysical medicine, in his studies of Biblical interpretation through Swedenborg, in his very thoughts as they are altered by his knowledge. When Hesselius meets him for the last time, he offers the vicar a specific warning: "You must promise me, my dear sir, not to trouble yourself with unnecessarily exciting thoughts; confine yourself strictly to the narrative of *facts*" (31). Jennings's attempt to give up tea is ultimately fruitless because it fails to acknowledge the more complicated interrelations of paganism. He cannot accept that his life and his intellect have become bound to paganism at multiple points. Each of these connections to this occult knowledge is hyperproductive of further associations, careening wildly out of control. Similar to the toxin that is Jennings's green tea, knowledge is difficult to discard as waste once imbibed. Jennings, inattentive to and distracted from the import of his actions, consistently underestimates the harmful practices that open him up to a waste ecology.

Hesselius's acceptance of this spiritual plane implies that the Victorian British Empire has always been contiguous with the spiritual, outside the knowledge of its people. The horror of this text, then, lies in Jennings's revelatory access to that spiritual plane, to that which humans ought never have access, and to gain the attention of a claiming influence. The consequence of this exposure is that Jennings is sacrificed, physically and spiritually; his body and soul alike end up as waste. His body becomes the waste product within the new material-spiritual ecology formed by the green tea; his identity as an imperial subject is wasted; his turn to paganism and despair renders his soul, in Christian terms, to waste. We may also consider this sequence in reverse; becoming waste in these imperial and Anglican senses is what makes possible a new ecology that redefines Jennings as yet another form of waste.

If Saint Dominic's legend is one of fervent focus, a zealous ability to turn from temptation toward the word of God, Le Fanu's tragic account dramatizes the failed negotiation of such a focus in a more modern age. Jennings's "waning of religious orthodoxy," to use Brantlinger's term, is not a turn to atheism but a difficulty in managing his attention in a modern, infinitely interrelated world. That his attention is no longer at his own command becomes clear when we consider Jennings's inconsistent

accounts of himself—inconsistencies of which he seems entirely unaware. He wavers between descriptions of his habits. His work routine, for instance, is one moment only “an hour or two in a library” and in another is to sit up “between eleven o’clock and two or three in the morning, my hours of going to bed” (22). He drinks green tea “frequently,” “every now and then as my work proceeded,” and enough to brew a kettle “two or three times” during his midnight vigil (22). This is the waste ecology in its cruellest and most ironic form. Jennings’s focus on his study of theology—here, pagan—requires a stimulant, which will ultimately remove his ability to focus on theology—here, Christian. Jennings’s distracted attention reaches its height when the monkey follows him into his pulpit. As he recounts to Hesselius, whenever he addresses his congregation, the monkey “would spring upon the open book and squat there, so that [he] was unable to see the page” (29). This episode in the pulpit appears in stark contrast to Saint Dominic, who also reads a devotional book when the devil tries to disrupt his work. In Le Fanu’s modern parallel, however, the monkey no longer speaks simply to satanic temptation, but also to the broader distractions, best intentions, and complex interrelations of a world outside of religious devotion. Jennings cannot perform the saint’s trick. The monkey halts his reading thoroughly and publicly.

### 3.3

Ultimately, the original legend of Saint Dominic is as much a tale of absorption and incorporation as it is of attention. When an *outré* element permeates into Saint Dominic’s religious practice, he is capable of incorporating that spiritual other into his mortal devotion. He makes use of these creatures in order to further his studies. The flea is converted to a bookmark, the monkey to a lamp. Jennings attempts a similar incorporation of an outside element—green tea—into his own studies. It proves, however, to be indigestible, too stubbornly *outré* and too interrelated into its context to be incorporated. Instead, it merely passes through ecological interrelations: from the outside world to his interior; from his digestive system to his nervous system; from his nervous system to his sensorium and his spiritual circulation. Green tea consistently works to disrupt and even redefine these subsystems. The indigestible, then, is that which can permeate an ecology, a body, but cannot be successfully incorporated into it. Le Fanu

imagines this as an ironically productive material relation, with each layer entangled in a weave of associations.

In this chapter, I have attempted a Dominican focus on a few small connections within a larger ecology, discussing the text's theological analogue to green tea's indigestible, recalcitrant components: occult paganism. At first, the story seems to connect green tea, a product of empire, and the monkey, emblematic of foreign environments, to the threat of foreign paganism. However, this is not a story of an Anglican vicar distracted by a pagan demon or imperial hallucinogen from his bible studies. Jennings spends his time studying ancient European pagan practices. His experience implies that occult paganism is global—at once foreign and ever present. For the dutiful Victorian Christian, occult paganism is the indigestible that has long since permeated European history and culture and yet remains unincorporated. Like the tea itself, occult paganism is long lasting and productive of new experiences, ecologies, and material relations.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Waste, in Bloom: William Robinson's Garden Waste Ecologies

By the mid-nineteenth century, the English garden was a celebration of human contrivance. Approximately between 1820 and 1880, the dominant gardening aesthetic employed in public and private gardens was the Victorian gardenesque,<sup>36</sup> which valued perfectly symmetrical designs, decorative tiling, grid-like paved walkways, and brightly coloured imported annuals laid out in carpet beds or geometric parterres.<sup>37</sup> John C. Loudon, one of the gardenesque's most public advocates, held that plants should be arranged to facilitate examination and admiration, as if the garden were a museum. In effect, the philosophy of the gardenesque was to heighten rather than to disguise the signs of artifice. In 1870, however, William Robinson—Irish horticultural correspondent, former gardener at the National Botanic Garden in Dublin, and foreman of the Royal Botanic Society's Garden in Regent Park—responded with his own vision of horticultural design and practice in a monograph titled *The Wild Garden* (1870). This work posited the wild garden (also known as the cottage garden) aesthetic as a rebuttal of the ostentatious artifice of the gardenesque. Fuelled by a nostalgic longing in the latter half of the nineteenth century for the rural landscapes and gardens displaced by urbanization and industrialization,<sup>38</sup> wild gardens favoured naturalized garden designs and tended to disguise or to minimize the appearance of human intervention and labour. And while Robinson was not the first to express some dissatisfaction with the gardenesque, his

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<sup>36</sup> Maria Ignatieva dates the influence of the gardenesque to approximately 1820 to 1880 and describes this particular horticultural aesthetic as an important precedent for what would become an increasingly globalized pattern of Western garden landscaping practices.

<sup>37</sup> Parterres refer generally to the ornamental division of the garden into discrete, visually defined spaces. This visual definition can take the form of flowerbeds bordered with stone or low hedges such as boxwood, or can be achieved by cement or gravel pathways. In formal gardens, parterres favour evenly distributed and grid-like spacing, as well as geometrically-shaped flower beds, and an overall symmetrical design.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Helmreich's "Re-presenting Nature" offers further discussion of the reimagined nationalism of Robinson's wild garden (88–111).



publications are particularly memorable for leveraging conflicting definitions of horticultural waste in order to advance a new garden aesthetic.

Under the gardenesque philosophy, waste was synonymous with irregularity and disorder. Loudon's *The Villa Gardener* (1850) insists that the "artist-like" flower-bed must be arranged with unerring symmetry, featuring or guided by "a line perfectly straight," arranged as though on a grid (22). To break with this system of rigid symmetry would result "in an unartist-like" design or an appearance of naturalism in the garden, with flowerbeds "thrown down in a natural manner, some in one direction and some in another, as if they had dropped off from a dried specimen in a herbarium" (22). In other words, the gardenesque considered organic structures, whether visual composition or the inevitable decay of plant matter, as waste. Robinson, by contrast, found the inflexible precision and artificiality of Loudon's designs intolerable and held that the designs found in nature set the highest possible standard of beauty in horticultural arrangement. His preference for more organic design composition is evident in his critique of mid-Victorian lawn-mowing methods:

Surely it is enough to have the lawn as smooth as a carpet at all times, without sending the mower to shave the 'long and pleasant grass' of the remoter parts of the grounds. It would indeed be well worth while to leave many parts of the grass unmown for the sake of growing Spring Bulbs. Observe how the poet's eye is caught by the buttercups that 'shine like gold' there; and we, who are continually talking of our 'horticultural skill and progress,' never so much as get near the effect produced by this very glinting field of buttercups, or attain to anything which at all equals it in beauty, although our opportunities to do so are unrivalled! (*WG* 22-23)

As Robinson laments the excessive lawn-mowing in large English estates, he idealizes that which would effectively be waste-plants and waste-lands in the eyes of the gardenesque. Common wildflowers and freely growing meadows might well be antithetical to climate-sensitive sub-tropical flowers and the exacting neatness of raised flowerbeds, boxed hedges, and closely trimmed lawns. Yet, the value that Robinson places in a "glinting field of buttercups" or long grasses is not only aesthetic, but also

botanical. Meadows both have pastoral beauty and offer botanical advantages for spring bulbs—advantages which in Robinson’s mind nineteenth-century “horticultural skill and progress” had yet to be able to reproduce artificially.

While the gardenesque, then, determined what was valuable and what was waste by prioritizing human systems of order and the experience of the human observer, Robinson’s wild garden defined waste according to the needs of a botanical ecology. For instance, Robinson took issue with the gardenesque’s tradition of designing gardens “from the point of view of the ‘decorator,’ *i.e.* beds without the slightest relation to garden use, difficult to plant, and very costly to form and to keep in order” (*EFG* 243). “The greatest waste of all,” he writes, “is owing to frivolous and thoughtless ‘design’ as to plan and shapes of the beds in the flower-garden” (*EFG* 243). More offensive still is the inorganic design of carpet bedding and parterres, which he describes as “showy masses of decided colour” (*WG* 4), “repulsively gaudy” (*WG* 5), and “base and frightfully opposed to every law of nature’s own arrangement of living things” (*WG* 6). With its rigid and inorganic designs, the gardenesque would see lilies planted “in isolated showy masses” and “in rigid unrelieved tufts in borders” (*WG* 13) and would result in “scattering things one likes all over the beds at equal distances” (*EFG* 247). Instead of “squaring” them in any stupid way,” however, Robinson prefers keeping plants “together in natural groups and colonies, where they are many times more effective to the eye” (*EFG* 247). The gardenesque structures and organizes the landscape to excess; its “gardens are laid out in a too complex way” (*EFG* 235), and that complexity is frequently achieved at the expense of plant life. Robinson, by contrast, argues that to impose such ordered designs and geometric shapes denies the beauty of more organic arrangements and threatens the botanical productivity of the garden.

These historical tensions between horticultural methodologies suggest that the Victorian garden was an attempt to realize a specific idealization of an ecology. Gardens were and are, in a sense, texts that reflect the gardener’s notions of value and of waste. What sets Robinson’s horticultural writings apart, and brings them within the purview of this dissertation, is their treatment of waste as an integral part of a garden ecology, as well as their rhetoric of ecological integrity. Examining his more famous *The Wild Garden* and

*The English Flower Garden* (1883), the comparatively lesser-known *Mushroom Culture* (1870), *God's Acre Beautiful* (1880), and select pieces from his horticultural magazine *The Garden*, this chapter considers how Robinson's notions of horticultural beauty and design advance a deeper philosophical argument about the value of waste ecologies and of restraining the impulse to impose order. This chapter takes up a subversive strain of Robinson's rhetoric, in both his horticultural books and in his horticultural journalism, that challenges the definitional limits of waste and advocates an ecologically-oriented gardening aesthetic that privileges the botanical over the human. Whereas the previous chapters of this dissertation deal with ecologies in a metaphorical and structural sense, this chapter argues that Robinson's work unites the figurative ecologies with which this dissertation has so far been concerned to the literal ecologies of the Victorian garden. In his rhetorical attempts to reintegrate waste back into a productive, non-anthropocentric ecology, Robinson's work champions the waste ecologies that get naturalized in the garden, the horticultural designs that promote botanical self-sufficiency, and an aesthetic philosophy that embraces the death of the human.

As I stipulated in my introduction, much of this dissertation is devoted to the idea that waste for Victorians undermined or revealed the fault lines of human systems of order. I have also mentioned, however, that there ran in the late-nineteenth century a parallel view of waste as vital to human subsistence. Darwin's *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms with Observations on their Habits* teases out the surprising material connections between worms and human culture, worm castings and agriculture, rudimentary organisms and archaeological ruins. As they aerate the soil, earthworms digest animal, vegetable, and mineral matter, "mingl[ing] the whole intimately together, like a gardener who prepares fine soil for his choicest plants" (309-310). This hidden process of intermingling wastes is, as Darwin suggests, immensely important to botanical, animal, and geological ecosystems. Donald Ulin was first to observe Darwin's rhetorical links between high culture (culture, archeology, taste) to the material conditions in which that culture appears (worms, excrement, decay). The activity and excrement of worms are vital and culturally relevant to humanity, and not to be dismissed as abject. If Darwin's worms exemplify the potential vitality of waste, Robinson's texts are equally subversive in reimagining horticultural wastes and waste

ecologies as sites of renewal and growth. Like the waste ecologies that we have seen throughout this dissertation, like Darwin's study of worms, Robinson situates the human within the material intimacies that exist among all things and that belie systems of classification and distinction. Robinson's gardening philosophy attempts to replicate the structural conditions of spontaneous, self-sustaining plant ecologies within the Victorian garden.

In order to understand Robinson's philosophy of horticultural waste ecologies, I begin with his examples of smaller-scale wastes—individual plants, fertilizers, or mulch—and how these forgotten or undesirable corners of the garden occupy a central position in his horticultural vision. Wastes take on unusual forms in Robinson's work, partly because he was responding to the value system that dominated Victorian horticultural practice during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and which came with its own classifications of waste. At this time, native English wildflowers “as hardy as our weeds” (*WG* 3) were often treated as such and dug up in favour of brightly coloured annuals. Weed-like wildflowers were generally held as the horticultural waste of the Victorian flower garden to be swept away, as dirt from a carpet. Robinson responds to these repudiations of wilderness with his own counterarguments for what should be considered waste in the opening chapter of *The Wild Garden*:

To most people a pretty plant in the wild state is more attractive than any garden denizen. It is free, and taking care of itself, it has had to contend with and has overcome weeds which, left to their own sweet will in a garden, would soon leave very small trace of the plants therein; and, moreover, it is usually surrounded by some degree of graceful wild spray—the green above, and the moss and brambles and grass around. (*WG* 11)

The notion that “a pretty plant in the wild state” is more beautiful than “any garden denizen” was a bold departure from the popular Victorian gardenesque, which exulted in feats of horticultural artifice. Wild and unfrequented terrain such as woods and meadows were as much the waste of landscape design as wildflowers were the waste of the garden—a wildflower growing in wild terrain doubly so. Though Robinson claims to invoke a popular view, he also asserts an extremely unpopular view for proponents of the

formal garden and the contemporary architects usually hired to design private gardens. Following his apparently popular claim, therefore, are three points of justification for the aesthetic beauty of wasted flowers growing in wasted lands. Firstly, the wild plant is self-reliant; it is “free” and “tak[es] care of itself.” Secondly, Robinson suggests that the wild plant’s hardiness is a point in its favour; it is more admirable for having “had to contend with and [to] overcome weeds.” Thirdly, the wild plant is more beautiful because of the compositional interest afforded by the colour and diverse textures of the wild growth around it; it is framed visually by the “graceful wild spray,” “the green above, and the moss and brambles and grass around.” What may appear to be neglected wilderness, a stubborn weed, and chaotic overgrowth can be understood as exemplars of independence, strength, and nuanced taste. Robinson, in other words, offers a combination of moral, biological, and aesthetic reasons for valuing so-called waste.

For Robinson, wilderness is inextricably involved in horticultural beauty. The author calls upon the reader to engage fully with the wild as an aesthetic entity, to incorporate and to embrace the wild as a foundational principle of garden design.

Select a wild rough slope, and embellish it with the handsomest and hardiest climbing plants . . . time would but add to its attractions, and the owner might go away for ten years, and find it more beautiful than ever on his return. As much may be said of all the other combinations which I suggest. (*WG* 16-17)

Robinson evinces a clear aesthetic preference for the wilderness that results from horticultural neglect; the “wild rough slope” has aesthetic merit in its own right that renders it a worthy medium for “the handsomest and hardiest climbing plants.” The garden can be “more beautiful than ever” left untended for ten years instead of being maintained continually. While Robinson’s proposed method might be taken as an aesthetics of neglect, it also seems that his aesthetic is consistently oriented toward the longevity and self-sufficiency of plant ecologies. Certain areas of the garden can become yet more beautiful if the gardener attends to the ecological needs of plant species in arranging them. Robinson observes the visual advantage that plants may have when they are mixed with other verdure, and how the alternating growth cycles of different plant

species both heighten the beauty of blooms and conceal the natural compost of plants outside their blooming season: “In a wild or semi-wild state, the beauty of individual species will proclaim itself when at its height; and when passed out of bloom, they will be succeeded by other kinds, or lost among the numerous objects around” (*WG* 13).

Aesthetic prowess in the garden, in other words, requires the gardener to manage the botanical and ecological needs of the plant life therein. With his emphasis on efficiency in the garden and interest in the long-term viability of botanical life, ecological sustainability is not only necessary to horticultural design—it is also beautiful. By showing how the diverse characteristics and needs of plants can be turned to aesthetic advantage, Robinson conceives of an aesthetic practice that relies on the health of botanical ecologies.

To take a representative example of the importance of ecological structure in Robinson’s work, we may turn to his objections to the carpet bedding method. The bedding method was a defining feature of the gardenesque and afterward of what would be known as the formal or architectural garden. Carpet bedding was and is still an expensive and labour-intensive method; each year, it requires a fresh supply of annuals to be purchased, matured in greenhouses, transplanted in the summer, and dug up and discarded after they are killed by the first frosts. The popularity of the gardenesque secured a consistently high demand for a limited supply of subtropical flowers, which had to be imported and matured in greenhouses, adding to the overall extravagance of cost and labour of the bedding system. Robinson, however, condemns carpet bedding as a waste both of resources and of plant life in *The Wild Garden* and *The English Flower Garden*. He resents the repetitive cycles of cost and labour sunk into carpet beds. The fragility of subtropical annuals and the necessity of buying and planting a fresh supply each spring in order to maintain the uniformity of the bed means that “the expense for this system is an annual one” (*WG* 5). Worse still, the gardenesque as a whole wastes the gardener’s time and labour; “the never-ending and wearisome scratchings of autumn and spring” (*EFG* 235) that gardeners must devote to “many needless walks and edgings” prevent them from “work[ing] in a simple way” because “half the time is lost in cleaning the feet, and taking care of useless or frivolous things” (*EFG* 235). Yet Robinson’s problem is not with expenditure and labour within the garden so much as with the fact that, under the

bedding system, neither contributes to the growing ecologies of the garden. “If we ruin ourselves through extravagance in gardening,” he writes, “let it be for living and beautiful things” (*EFG* 240). Indeed, the carpet bedding method does not improve or prolong plant life, but rather systematizes its decay. Robinson’s work treats the Victorian garden as an ecology of waste ecologies—of coordinated biospheres with which the human gardener may respectfully fall into step or upon which the gardener might impose a rigid framework and so make true waste of ecologies. And it was this latter practice that formed Robinson’s main objection to the gardenesque and to the formal or architectural garden style that succeeded it.

Several years after Robinson and his contributors (including Gertrude Jekyll) began publishing on the cottage gardening aesthetic, Reginald Blomfield and Francis Inigo Thomas released a competing horticultural treatise, *The Formal Garden in England* (1892). This rival aesthetic, which was a mid- to late-nineteenth-century successor to the gardenesque, considered the surrounding spaces of a building, including the design and layout of the gardens, to fall within the province of the architect. The subsequent feud that developed between the formal gardening school and that of the cottage garden was essentially a philosophical dispute over the relative prominence in the garden given to human artifice and to the integrity of the garden’s waste ecologies. The public disagreements between Robinson and both Blomfield and Sedding—a debate which spanned books, periodicals, and pamphlets—became emblematic of the widespread tensions between their respective schools of horticultural design, the wild garden and the formal garden. Anne Helmreich refers to both sides of this feud as “landscape gardeners” and “garden designers” (“Re-presenting Nature” 111). For a landscape gardener like Robinson, all outdoor landscaping should be arranged around the ecological needs of the garden and should therefore fall under the province of the gardener. Garden designers like Blomfield and Thomas, by contrast, viewed the garden as a structural extension of a house or building and therefore as that which should be guided by architectural precepts and designs. Yet, this tension suggests more than the struggles between two professions vying for pre-eminence within landscaping. Both ends of this dispute evoke a deeper philosophical debate over the extent to which the human, and human systems of order, should hold sway within the garden.

In their preface to the first edition of *The Formal Garden*, Blomfield and Thomas argue that the “straight lines and geometrical curves” of architecture are not artificial constraints so much as an amplification of the “premeditated form” that human labour cannot help but bring to a given work. The authors insist that “[t]here is order everywhere and there is no escaping it” (*FGE* 3). They accuse the landscape or wild gardener, however, of a “studied avoidance of all order” inherent to human endeavour by “systematically dispens[ing] with any kind of system whatever” (*FGE* 3, 2) and favouring instead the spontaneity of nature. The formal garden, in other words, held the “studied avoidance of all order” as a waste of human contrivance. Some of Blomfield and Thomas’s choicest attacks against Robinson employ memorable metaphors of waste. In one example, the authors explain that formal gardening seeks harmony between the house and its grounds and to prevent the house becoming, as cottage gardeners would have it, “an excrescence on the face of nature” (*FGE* 2). Instead of making a distasteful attempt to reconcile human contrivance and ecologies in nature, Blomfield and Thomas argue that both the building and the surrounding grounds should announce themselves as human interventions in nature. The cottage gardener’s attempt to embrace ecological design is a “trick of imitation” when the business of landscaping should be anthropocentric or “an affair of a dominant idea which stamps its impress on house and grounds alike” (*FGE* 3). In maintaining that “[t]he building cannot resemble anything in nature, unless you are content with a mud-hut and cover it with grass” (*FGE* 2), the authors equate ecological structure and design with waste.

Robinson, unsurprisingly, held an entirely different view and made no attempt to disguise his incensed critiques of this formal gardening approach. In an 1892 pamphlet review of *The Formal Garden*, Robinson bluntly sums up his views on the authors’ proposed horticultural aesthetic:

The good sense of English writers and landscape gardeners refused to accept as right or reasonable the architect’s garden, a thing set out as bricks and stones are, and the very trees of which were mutilated to meet his views as to ‘design,’ or rather to prove his not being able to see the simplest elements of design in landscape beauty or natural form. (*Garden Design and Architects’ Gardens* vii-viii)



Setting aside his aspersions on the lack of “good sense” or of the “right or reasonable” in the architect’s garden, however, Robinson objects to Blomfield and Thomas’s orderly designs and their emphasis of human artifice over “natural form” and botanical ecologies. His issue is with garden designers using the garden as a vehicle for their own architectural ingenuity—as “a thing set out as bricks and stones are”—and “mutilat[ing]” nature in the process.<sup>39</sup> Robinson’s passing gestures to design composition imply more than a difference of aesthetic; his work follows a deeper impetus to suppress or restrain human endeavour and anthropocentric systems of order when he accuses Blomfield and Thomas of failing to notice “the simplest elements of design in landscape beauty or natural form.” We see this, as well, when Robinson later expresses a wish that some of the more picturesque houses may not be “disfigured by the fashions in formality the authors wish to see revived” or by “the architect’s senseless craving for ‘order and balance’” (*GD* xii). These remarks echo his earlier critique of the gardenesque bedding system as “base and frightfully opposed to every law of nature’s own arrangement of living things” (*WG* 6). The strength of Blomfield’s and Thomas’s subsequent objections to the wild garden suggests that Robinson’s philosophy of opposing human interference, of subordinating human life and endeavour to plant life, was well understood. This vitriolic pamphlet most likely caused Blomfield to release a second edition of *The Formal Garden* only nine months after the first in order to include a preface responding to Robinson’s attacks.

Whether Robinson’s critiques of his contemporaries are directed to the gardenesque or the formal garden, his responses to both call for a reorientation toward an ecological design composition. At its core, Robinson’s issue with the gardenesque and the formal garden are issues with the fundamental error of making waste of functional ecologies and ignoring botanically productive waste. The clearest examples of Robinson’s indignant attitude toward ecological neglect appear in a chapter of *The English Flower Garden*

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<sup>39</sup> Aurélien Wasilewski suggests that social class tensions were also at play Robinson’s aesthetic opposition to the architectural garden, since Victorian architects enjoyed a social prestige that did not extend to gardeners.

titled “Some Sources of Waste”. This chapter enumerates waste that interferes with the botanical ecologies of the garden. “Fancy Edgings of cast stone or tile ware to beds and walks” (*EFG* 239), for instance, are one such type of waste that is incompatible with the long-term needs and longevity of the garden. Robinson calls these edgings “costly, ugly, needless, and a great source of waste” (*EFG* 239)—characteristics that seem discrete but are ultimately bound up in waste. Edgings become a waste of money and a waste of aesthetic endeavour only when they interfere with the potential plant life that might have grown in their place. Robinson tolerates costliness to a certain extent, provided that the expenditures in some way enable thriving plant life. However, as Robinson observes, the “money spent on [edgings] in a single county (now and then, indeed, in a single place) would form many lovely gardens” (*EFG* 240). Where expense and endeavour might otherwise support “good plants and good ways of growing them,” costly “stone rubbish” is clearly seen by him to be waste (*EFG* 240).

Waste may be redistributed and need not remain in the exact ecologies that produced them, as long as their new ecology continues to function with aesthetic and botanical harmony. Robinson, in short, engages with competing horticultural aesthetics on the basis that a garden’s beauty comes from the structural integrity of its waste ecologies. Nature, for Robinson, was an aesthetic end in itself—one which hinged on waste. In a set of remarks for which he would become famous—and which often would get cited by critics such as Blomfield<sup>40</sup>—Robinson describes nature’s unique compositional merits:

Nature *in puris naturalibus* we cannot have in our gardens, but Nature’s laws should not be violated; and few human beings have contravened them more than our flower-gardeners during the past twenty years. We should compose from Nature, as landscape artists do. We may have in our gardens—and without making wildernesses of them either—all the shade, the relief, the grace, the beauty, and

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<sup>40</sup> Blomfield cites a distorted version of the following quotation in *The Formal Garden*, but it is not clear whether or not Blomfield misquoted Robinson. Given Robinson’s proclivity for recycling his own phrases across his many publications, it is entirely possible that Blomfield was using an obscure edition of either *The Parks and Gardens of Paris* or *The Subtropical Garden*.

nearly all the irregularity of Nature. (*The Subtropical Garden* 5)<sup>41</sup>

By referring to “landscape artists,” Robinson invokes the naturalism of fine arts—and the beauty that comes of imitating nature—to validate “Nature’s laws” or an ecological structure as an aesthetic principle. This principle, however, does not extend only to the decorative. Robinson gives the same grammatical importance to “shade,” “relief,” and “irregularity” as he does to more conventional “grace” and “beauty.” Rather than trying to abnegate all traces of waste, as the formal garden does, Robinson aestheticizes waste—be it waste matter such as manure and weeds, or a compositional waste in the sense of negative space—as a foil, or contrasting agent, to bring the central object of attraction into greater relief.

Not only does Robinson insist upon the untapped potential of the local wilderness, his practical, spatial, and aesthetic objections are inextricably linked to his moral concern for the welfare of plant life. He represents the annual waste of plant life necessitated by the bedding system as acts of cruelty. The sub-tropical “tender plants” or “subjects” are ruthlessly “cut down” by gardeners and winter frosts alike (*WG* 4). He expostulates with gardeners who dig up borders around their shrubberies or “make war upon the roots of everything” therein (*WG* 34). The author creates a sense of pathos for those plants that are “mutilate[d],” “disturbed,” “destroyed,” “displaced,” and “injured” (*WG* 34). In one instance, he describes the turned soil in the borders of London parks as a spectacle on par with the aftermath of some violent disaster:

Instead of finding the earth covered, or nearly covered, with vegetation close to the margin, and each individual developed into something like a respectable specimen of its kind, we find a spread of recently-dug ground, and the plants upon it with an air of having recently suffered from a

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<sup>41</sup> Robinson occasionally combines these sentences with the following remarks, which appear in the third edition of *The Parks, Promenades, and Gardens of Paris*: “it is his [the gardener’s] privilege to make ever-changing pictures out of Nature’s own materials—sky and trees, and water and flowers and grass. If he would not prefer this to painting in pigments, he has no business to be a landscape-gardener” (76).

whirlwind, or some calamity that necessitated the removal of mutilated branches. Rough-pruners precede the diggers, who sweep along from margin to back, plunging deeply round and about plants, shrubs, or trees. . . . There is no relief to the spectacle; the same thing occurs everywhere . . . (WG 35)

Through his rhetoric, Robinson sensationalizes the common practice in formal gardens of creating a border of bare soil around flowerbeds by digging up anything growing immediately around the beds. His objections to this practice are that it not only damages the roots, bulbs, or branches of nearby plants, but it is also less aesthetically pleasing than “vegetation close to the margin” that exhibits a healthy, “respectable” growth. Robinson also uses natural disasters as metaphors for overbearing or unrestrained human artifice. The excessive systematization of formal gardening, he suggests, destroys and mutilates life as much as the “whirlwind” or “calamity.” What he observes, ultimately, is the gardener’s (and the human’s) failure to curb a frenetic impulse toward dominion and order.

We see further the comingling of Robinson’s ecological and aesthetic interests as he observes bitterly that the result of such wastefulness is “a sparse depopulated aspect” and little more than “the annual darkening of the surface by the upturned earth” (WG 34). Robinson’s works celebrate one understanding of waste at the expense of others—the unfashionable hardy wildflowers relegated to the status of weeds for that which is economically, aesthetically, and ecologically extravagant. Both his garden books and his journalism rely on the rhetorical tensions and grammatical comparisons between competing definitions of waste in order to argue that the economic and aesthetic limitations of the gardenesque do not account for the ecological dimensions of horticulture. As he normalizes the waste that is serviceable to plant growth and recharacterizes solely decorative practices as the more problematic waste, Robinson effectively aestheticizes one form of waste over another.

Robinson was not unique in eulogizing the natural landscape or his nostalgic longing for a pre-industrial English garden.<sup>42</sup> Helmreich suggests that the cottage garden and native wildflowers were often invoked to express an English romantic nationalism, or “the adaptation of folk or other indigenous cultures to express a country’s identity” (47).

Romantic nationalism was a late-nineteenth-century European phenomenon that represented both “a nostalgic reaction to industrialization and a means to negotiate the rapid and abrupt transmutations of modernity” (47). According to Helmreich, some link English romantic nationalism to the origins of the Arts and Crafts movement, some key figures of which held romantic nationalist views. William Morris and John Ruskin<sup>43</sup> both opposed bedded-out gardens, associating them with the commercial/industrial, and Morris was one of those who expressed nostalgic longings for native English flowers and plants (and which he featured in his prints and designs).<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the popularity of Robinson’s aesthetic was due in part to its compatibility with this larger vein of romantic nationalism. This chapter, however, is less interested in Robinson’s contribution to this movement, which is already dealt with extensively in Helmreich’s *The English Garden and National Identity*, and focuses instead upon the implications of Robinson’s rhetoric of structural ecologies.

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<sup>42</sup> While scholars note that Shirley Hibberd had been advocating a return to hardy flowers at least a decade before Robinson published *The Wild Garden* (1870), the latter was nonetheless instrumental in popularizing this method, not least because of the fierce debates in which he engaged through his various publishing outlets. These alternately horticultural, aesthetic, and ideological debates had a broad canvas of readers. As Helmreich has observed, garden literature—whether books, periodicals, or pamphlets—became a relatively accessible genre due to the thriving print and illustration industries from the 1870s onward (*English Garden*, 40). The ready supply of raw materials and improved printing methods opened the genre to a readership that ranged from socio-economic elites to educated labourers. Robinson could therefore be certain of a readership across classes for both his widely sold books and the issues of his horticultural magazine, *The Garden*.

<sup>43</sup> Ruskin held particularly disdainful views of bedded-out gardens: “A flower-garden is an ugly thing, even when best managed: it is an assembly of unfortunate beings, pampered and bloated above their natural size, stewed and heated into diseased growth; corrupted by evil communication into speckled and in harmonious colours; torn from the soil which they loved, and of which they were the spirit and the glory, to glare away their term of tormented life among the mixed and incongruous essences of each other, in earth they know not, and in air that is poison to them. The florist may delight in this: the true lover of flowers never will.” (“The British Villa,” p. 156-157).

<sup>44</sup> While Morris does not explicitly endorse a specific horticultural style, he nonetheless suggests that garden design is a tonic to industrialization and describes urban garden spaces architectural extensions of the house (Helmreich, *English Garden* 96).

## 4.1

Anna L. Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* contains a lucid account of the kinds of antithetical combinations brought together within ecologies, which we can apply productively to the wastes and waste-spaces in Robinson's aesthetic. The premise of Tsing's book—which centres on the prized matsutake mushroom somehow able to grow in human-disturbed forests and in the nuclear ruins of post-Second-World-War Hiroshima—is to analyze “disturbance-based ecologies in which many species sometimes live together without either harmony or conquest” (5). While Tsing's case studies for “disturbance-based ecologies” are set in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, her method relies on an understanding of the alienation produced by capitalist economies that has important implications for my discussion of Victorian waste ecologies. Tsing suggests that capitalist investors have historically treated ecologically enmeshed matter as resources, which effectively “imbue[s] both people and things with alienation, that is, the ability to stand alone, as if the entanglements of living did not matter” (5). This neglect of the material entanglements among animal, vegetable, and mineral is precisely Robinson's issue with the horticultural aesthetic movements that competed against his own.

Alienation presumes the transferability of the components of an ecology; “people and things become mobile assets; they can be removed from their life worlds in distance-defying transport to be exchanged with other assets from other life worlds, elsewhere” (5). In presuming this transferability or mobility of living and nonliving things, Tsing writes that alienation denies the ecological relations that bind all things in a specific ecology:

Alienation obviates living-space entanglement. The dream of alienation inspires landscape modification in which only one stand-alone asset matters; everything else becomes weeds or waste. Here, attending to living-space entanglements seems inefficient, and perhaps archaic. When its singular asset can no longer be produced, a place can be abandoned. The timber has been cut; the oil has run out; the plantation soil no longer supports crops. The search for assets resumes elsewhere. Thus, simplification for

alienation produces ruins, spaces of abandonment for asset production. (5-6)<sup>45</sup>

Before the landscape is run through crude filters of economic resources and alienation, everything within it is assigned to one of two categories—“singular asset” and “weeds or waste.” This sweeping categorization of non-resources as waste recalls Robinson’s complaint over the selective attention given to certain flowers and plants deemed fashionable. He laments that this unmitigated preference for “repulsively gaudy” (*WG* 5) sub-tropical flowerbeds has destroyed the hardy “sweet old border flowers” that once characterized Elizabethan mixed-border gardens. He takes issue, in other words, with the horticultural economy’s fixation on a singular asset at the expense of horticultural ecologies—or the “living-space entanglement” that involves all plant life. Robinson’s aesthetic foreshadows Tsing’s critique of alienated landscapes—or alienated gardens, in this case, which under the gardenesque are devoted to successively producing a singular asset of sub-tropical annuals. In both cases, whether the singular asset is timber, oil, crops, or seasonal flowers, alienation, or the careless transplantation from one living-space entanglement to another, still overlooks the complex interrelations of both ecologies.

Robinson exhorts readers to turn our attention to the necessary material interaction between waste—i.e., waste in the sense of decomposed organic matter such as manure, fertilizer, and compost—and beautiful garden flowers. His language routinely undermines the pejorative connotations of these wastes:

Cocoa-fibre refuse is the neatest mulch, being so clean to use. The next best material is decayed leaf-soil: this, sifted, also looks neat, but under sunshine it soon shrinks away, and requires renewing. Well-rotted stable-manure is another good mulch, particularly for plants we wish to feed well, like Dahlias. The mowings of lawn Grass is a good mulch

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<sup>45</sup> When Tsing declares her refusal “to reduce either economy or ecology to the other,” she seems to imply a general tendency in critical discourses to treat the terms interchangeably—one from which Tsing is evidently anxious to distance her work (5). With this caution, Tsing introduces alienation as a concept that intersects both economy and ecology.

for beds, and should not be wasted, especially where there are recently transplanted shrubs. (*EFG* 237)

The garden ecology has a holistic, integrated structure, which means that even manure and waste are involved in the garden's beauty. It is not that manure itself is beautiful so much as that which we find beautiful in the garden necessarily exists in close proximity to that which we find repulsive. From the first sentence of this passage, Robinson demands that we attend to "refuse," as well as to its degrees of variation, as subjects worthy of examination, and renders a compelling portrait of waste as tidy, nutritious, and stimulating growth. "Cocoa-fibre refuse" stands in high stead for being "the neatest mulch" and "so clean to use." He reminds us that, for the gardener, decay signifies increased value and not its depletion. Mulch or compost is useful enough that its disappearance by decomposition is regrettable. The "neat" blend of "decayed leaf-soil" too "soon shrinks away." All the while, the author conveys his taking this set of waste beliefs for granted, making no explanatory concessions to readers who do not share his perspective. He speaks of how the leaf-soil frequently "requires renewing," freely associating an image of decay with a notion of replenishment. The stable manure is not simply rotted, but "[w]ell-rotted"; greater decay corresponds to greater value. Robinson also implies a sustainability to this plant ecology, where that which is "[w]ell-rotted" tends to "feed well" other plants that may in turn rot well; the digested food of one organism becomes a new food source for other plants living in the same ecology. Replenishment thus begets more replenishment. Even the lawn clippings play a central role. The garden is an ecology of waste and growth that is both natural and aesthetic. This is a domain where refuse and decay bear degrees of neatness and cleanliness, where the rotten is not pejorative and the "[w]ell-rotted" is desirable, and where waste itself "should not be wasted." Robinson's discussion of mulch, however, is not only remarkable for subverting the stigma attached to garden wastes; it also applies to these wastes a language of aesthetic appraisal. The neatness that he observes in cocoa-fibre and decayed-leaf compost has to do with visual organization—an appearance of tidiness. To the modern reader, the idea of weighing decay or debris by its neatness or cleanliness borders on parody, and yet the gardener necessarily does so to keep the garden beautiful.



As we have already seen, Robinson believes that “a pretty plant in the wild state is more attractive than any garden denizen” (*WG* 11). Although Robinson encourages the cultivation of one kind of abandoned space which he finds in itself worthwhile, these colonies of newly naturalized wildflowers are not to be converted into another landscape to be alienated for another singular asset. When Robinson recommends wild spaces for naturalizing imported plants, he does not mean for the wild garden to become a sort of production apparatus for furnishing the flower garden with new hardy plants. He is clear, therefore, that the imported flowers that he proposes to naturalize in these wild spaces should remain within those spaces. We see further proof against the notion that Robinson is merely constructing another landscape to alienate when he returns to the subject of unmown grass in *The English Flower Garden*:

A flowering meadow is one of the most beautiful things in Nature, and our park or garden lawns might be lovely with the Grass growing long and with many flowers in it. The Grass itself should be a beautiful garden. We should see in it, as we often see in an alpine meadow, fair flowers which grow in English as well as in alpine turf. By allowing the Grass to grow in spring and till maturity, this phase of the wild garden will be enjoyed, and plants will come up year after year to reward us. (*EFG* 236)

Robinson’s statement that “Grass itself should be a beautiful garden” is suggestive. He finds value in the abandoned space that cannot be reduced to a singular resource, that is based on its strength and complexity as an ecology. What he suggests in other words is not the rehearsal of landscape alienation. The long grass and flowers that Robinson recommends for parks and garden lawns are meant to imitate the aesthetic and ecological beauty of the meadow, which “is one of the most beautiful things in Nature.” The “fair flowers” whose perennial reappearance is a “reward” for resisting the temptation to intervene can only do so in their ecological situatedness. In short, the ways in which Tsing intersects capitalist rhetoric with ecological structures help us to articulate the complexity of Robinson’s treatment of waste and waste-spaces in the garden.

Robinson’s ecological thinking is not restricted to the botanical life within gardens; it extends also to the interrelations among the diverse spatial locations in a garden.

Visually, spaces are structured and defined by other contrasting spaces. Botanically, the organic waste produced by one space, such as clippings from lawns, nourish and fertilize the shrubs of another space. Maintaining spatial diversity is important to Robinson's aesthetic and ecological philosophies, and the gardener plays a pivotal role in coordinating those spaces to their visual and botanical benefit. Achieving this spatial diversity means accepting certain parts of even the bedding system. In the same moment that he criticizes the geometric design principles of the gardenesque, he acknowledges "[i]t is also clear that, base and frightfully opposed to every law of nature's own arrangement of living things as is the bedding system, it has yet some features which deserve to be retained on a small scale" (*WG* 6). Robinson does meditate on the superior beauty of wildflowers, untouched grass meadows, and even large expanses of bog with such rapturous hyperbole in a manner that made it easy for his critics to misinterpret this alternative approach to an extreme. As Helmreich points out, however, it would be a mistake to assume from Robinson's passionate hyperbole on the beauty of wild plants that the author is calling for the garden to become a total and uniform wilderness. Robinson was in practice more willing to incorporate geometric designs than one would expect from his published opinions, and did not in practice insist on this organicism of design as dogmatically as his language might suggest. Gertrude Jekyll evidently "used to relate with great glee the fact that Robinson designed himself a garden all squares, and Reggy [i.e., Reginald Blomfield] a garden on a cliff with not a straight line in it" (qtd. in Massingham 75).<sup>46</sup>

My previous chapters have dealt with waste ecologies dominated or redefined by one type of waste that proliferates—whether contagious dust, transformative river sludge, hyper-productive papers, vaporized human bodies, or indigestible colonial spectres. This final chapter does consider individual types of waste to an extent, such as weeds and manure, and these come together as an ecology in the most traditional sense. The draw of

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<sup>46</sup> Original source missing. Massingham quotes this comment, which was reportedly made by Arts and Crafts architect Harold Falkner, but no source text or further information about the primary source appears in the article.

Robinson's texts, however, lies in their exploration of several waste ecologies in coordination. The large estate garden contains many different ecologies productive of their own form of waste, and Robinson in large measure holds the gardener responsible for connecting and coordinating those dispersed ecological spaces through that waste. Waste from one part of the grounds—such as cocoa-fibre or grass clippings—is essential mulch or fertilizer for other parts. The gardener always has this capacity to integrate waste back into a garden ecology, and only in neglecting this work does the garden produce true waste.

The primary aim of *The Wild Garden* is to propose a compositional balance for the garden that incorporates elements of both the bedding and mixed-border methods, not to argue for the elimination of all gardenesque elements; only by maintaining this balance of contrasting spaces, of wild and semi-wild spaces as well as lawns and flower-beds, can the horticultural landscape become “paradises of vernal beauty” (*WG* 10). For Robinson, waste matter becomes productive in an ecology of diverse garden spaces that themselves form ecologies. Robinson holds the gardener responsible for coordinating and interrelating all of these ecologies—manicured lawns, wild and neglected gardens, aesthetic wastes, and productive decay, alike. The work of the gardener, as the artist of landscaping, is to manage an ecology of ecologies. A diversity of landscaping terrain, as we have already seen, suits Robinson's ideas of visual design composition.

Locational variety also carries botanical benefits; the garden's flowerbeds and “recently transplanted shrubs” need to be fertilized. And, considering the value of lawn clippings as mulch, locational variety is key to the survival of the garden ecology. Robinson imitates this balancing work in his prose, continually interrelating the different components of the horticultural canvas. And this coordination can involve plants from entirely different regions; *The Wild Garden* is primarily an argument about how gardeners and landowners should import hardy wildflowers from around the world and naturalize them in the unfrequented stretches of wilderness and the meadows scattered throughout public and private grounds. Robinson suggests this method as a way of diversifying and multiplying the plant species hardy enough to withstand English winters, and which were ostensibly driven to near-extinction as a result of the vogue for sub-tropical annuals. Because there

are yet “no attractions in semi-wild places compared to what it is within our power to create” (*WG* 10), landscape and garden ecologies suffer a permanent loss when such opportunities for beauty and biodiversity are wasted. Robinson’s waste-spaces allow us to consider what happens to large-scale wastes—specifically, what happens to waste when it forms the connective tissue between the garden’s diverse spaces. In a sense, the Robinsonian garden is one large ecology of smaller ecologies—the lawn, the meadow, the flower bed, the mushroom bed—and the role of the gardener is to manage and to coordinate the wastes that need to move between them. We may move away from individual waste ecologies, in other words, in order to comprehend the broader ecology that combines them.

This method of coordinating and repurposing the waste of different locations appears in *Mushroom Culture*, in which Robinson instructs readers on how to build their own mushroom beds by repurposing stables, disused sheds, or empty cellars. Given the ready availability of horse manure, especially in cities like London with large networks of carriage-drivers, Robinson imagines rapturously how “every cart of stable-manure produced in this great horse-keeping country may, on its way towards decomposition and replenishing the earth, be made a nidus for furnishing many dishes of [mushrooms]” (*MC* vii). Here, as with mulch, Robinson’s rhetoric makes a virtue of nourishment or replenishment through decay and decomposition. His aestheticization of waste, however, is more subtle: manure is the point of origin for mushrooms not in and of themselves, but as “many dishes”—as that which will be given culinary arrangement and presentation. Waste is a nidus for culinary artistry; sustainable consumption can be beautiful, presentable.

The nexus of relations between the various wastes and garden ecologies in Robinson’s work suggests that waste is location-specific. The manure that enables mushrooms and flowers to proliferate ceases to be waste within the garden ecology. By contrast, carpet bedding is antithetical to the sustainable garden ecology. Carpet and wallpaper might belong in the house, but their stasis and botanical non-productivity make them waste in the garden. For Robinson, including such wastes into the garden brings aesthetic consequences:

... a person naturally rests his eyes a shorter time on the ordinary bedding arrangement or ribbon border than on the new wall paper in his bed-room. And this is no mere 'matter of taste' as it is very often thoughtlessly said to be. It is utterly impossible for any person with any knowledge of the glorious richness and infinite variety of the garden flora now within our reach to take any real interest in the geometrical colouring of the ground with plants, which is called bedding out! Hence it is to a great extent simply a question of intelligence as regards plants and also of mental growth. ("Bedding Out," 334)

This excerpt from Robinson's horticultural magazine, *The Garden*, draws a comparison between plant life and interior decoration that recurs several times throughout his works. Robinson takes issue with garden designs driven by architectural display not only for their neglect of plant ecologies, but also for their limited appeal in terms of visual composition. He disparages the designer who willingly substitutes "glorious richness and infinite variety" for "ordinary" arrangements and "geometrical colouring." We see the same critique implied in his repeated comparisons of the formal garden to wallpaper, furniture, and carpets. In *Wild Garden*, for instance, he remarks rather snidely that part of the appeal of an uncultivated field is the absence of "man and his muddlings in the earth, or his exceeding weakness for tracing wall-paper patterns" (*WG* 23). When he returns to the same comparison in *The English Flower Garden*, however, Robinson offers some explanation for the logic behind his critique:

Designs that were well enough for furniture or walls or panels when applied to the garden gave us a new set of difficulties. Carried out in wood or in the carpet they answer their purpose, if we like them; but a flower bed is a thing for continual work, both in cultivating and in arranging and keeping it, and therefore it is best to see that we are not bothered by needless complexities in dealing with the ground. (*EFG* 245)

In recreating the effect of wallpaper in the context of the garden, the gardenesque and the formal garden aesthetic treat three-dimensional garden spaces as flat, two-dimensional surfaces. By failing to discriminate between those wastes that fuel garden ecologies and those that undermine them, the garden designer is at a fundamental disadvantage. By forcing inorganic designs—the "ribbon border," the quotidian "wall paper," and the

monotonous geometry—onto organic matter and ecological spaces, garden designers show their limited judgment in spatial arrangement, as well as disrupt the foundational ecologies of the garden. Robinson demonstrates how, in their attempts to renovate what the gardenesque and the formal garden consider to be waste, both aesthetics transform the garden from a space reliant on wastes to one so wasteful that even waste itself goes to waste.

The spatial dimension to Robinson's critique and aesthetic brings us to a locational understanding of waste. On the one hand, there are waste-spaces that are neglected, abandoned, or for some reason deemed undesirable. As with Tsing's abandoned landscapes, these alienated spaces are characterized by a singular asset, and their structures understood two-dimensionally. On the other hand, Robinson suggests that waste is location-specific; what is waste in the home ceases to be waste in the garden. Ruins and moss-covered walls cease to be wasted land when they are repurposed for naturalizing and showcasing alpine and rock plants. "Any species of out-house" (*MC* 43)<sup>47</sup> is a potential shelter for mushroom cultures rather than a superfluous structure; "[o]ne of the best crops [Robinson] ha[d] ever seen was grown in a dry and unused coach-house" (*MC* 43). Spaces cease to be metaphoric waste lands when they are reoriented toward an ecology. The designation of waste spaces, for him, should be determined by their compatibility or incompatibility with botanical ecologies.

The most dramatic example of Robinson's vision of spatial waste redeemed by its ecological structure appears in his plans for bog-gardens—plans which take for granted the unique botanical beauty found in fallow land. By proposing ways of artificially flooding English gardens to imitate the growing conditions of North American bogs, Robinson reassesses literal waste-lands as aesthetically viable spaces worthy of imitation. He wonders with concern:

. . . who shall record the beauty and interest of the flowers  
of the wide-spreading marsh-lands of this little globe of

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<sup>47</sup> That is, in the sense of a subsidiary building such as a shed or stable, and not of a lavatory (*OED*).

ours, from those of the vast wet woods of America, dark  
 and brown, and hidden from sunbeams, where the fair  
 flowers only meet the eyes of water-snakes and frogs, to  
 those of the breezy uplands of the high Alps, far above the  
 woods, where the little bogs teem with Nature's most vivid  
 jewellery, joyous in a bright sun, and dancing in the breeze?  
 No one worthily, for no one knows.  
 ("The Bog-Garden" 7)

The "beauty and interest" of these plants must not be witnessed only by "the eyes of water-snakes and frogs" or remain hidden in the Alps. These specimens are "joyous" and "dancing" performance, as well as "Nature's most vivid jewellery" and most worthy of display. Besides these ornamental flowers, Robinson also recommends "Vigorous Marsh and Water-Side Plants"—a "group of the boldest" of which "is strikingly effective in the picturesque garden" ("Bog-Garden" 24). The flowers that do grow in marshy ground are more beautiful for it; "even by the margins of the railroads, one sees the vivid blooms of the Cardinal Flower spring erect from the wet peaty hollows" ("Bog-Garden" 7). Robinson finds the bog itself beautiful enough that, "[i]t should only be made in a picturesque part of the grounds" ("Bog-Garden" 7). Attuned to both the ecological needs and organic beauty of waste-land, Robinson reclaims wasted lands by imposing new ecologies onto them. This method is limited, of course, by the fact that it displaces and disrupts plant ecologies all over the world. However, Robinson is at least aware enough of the living-space entanglements of plants—and the role of waste therein—to recommend numerous steps by which readers might recreate these ecological conditions. The author goes so far as to bind the care and maintenance of the artificial bog-garden to parenthood. He exhorts the English gardener to supply "a home for the numerous children of the world that will not thrive on our harsh, bare, and dry garden-borders, but must be cushioned on moss, and associated with their own relatives in moist peat soil" ("Bog-Garden" 7), implying a parallel between the gardener's concern for the ecological needs of his plants to parents' concern for the wellbeing of their children.

Waste may also come from the gardener's mismanagement of the diversity of plant species. While Robinson's ideal garden is "very beautiful and interesting with a varied life," he complains of the public taste for monotony and imitation in garden design, which causes nurseries to "only grow few stereotyped things" rather than risk introducing

new or rare species (*EFG* 242). This pattern of supply and demand leads to a further tendency for growers to stock “shrubs of little or no beauty” that “have overrun and killed far more precious things. And this nursery rubbish having eaten up every good thing begins to eat up itself, and hence we see so many shrubberies worn out” (*EFG* 242). This “nursery rubbish” is a rare instance in which Robinson names a form of waste-plant—one that exhibits a partly cannibalistic, partly autophagic violence within the garden. The author advises some precautionary measures against this violence, too, as he observes “that the success of the bog-garden will depend on the continuous care bestowed in preventing rapidly-growing or coarse plants from exterminating others, or from taking such a hold in the soil that it becomes impossible to grow any delicate or minute plant in it” (“Bog-Garden” 24). The gardener’s work, in other words, is to serve as a caretaker of plant life and of the overall ecological health of the garden.

For Robinson, beautiful gardens should harmonize with their surrounding landscape and accommodate thriving plant life—that is, they should be “sensibly laid out to suit the ground, the plants” (*EFG* 247). This view contains a subtle orientation toward ecologies that privileges the botanical over the human. In a sense, the gardener’s work is to prioritize the garden beyond human life and interests—to help it become hardy and independent, rather like the wildflower—so that the garden as a whole may become a permanent, self-sustaining ecology. This ethos is frequently manifest in the many garden reforms that Robinson recommends in *The Wild Garden*. In one such reform, Robinson recommends naturalizing imported alpine flowers in English woods, meadows, and unfrequented semi-wild areas. This suggestion shows the naturalization method in the context of its potential to create a self-sustaining wild garden out of stray outdoor spaces. The wild garden created by naturalizing “the handsomest and hardiest climbing plants” upon a “wild rough slope” has “the great merit of permanence” (*WG* 16). “Arranged with some judgment at first,” he writes, “such a colony might be left to take care of itself; time would but add to its attractions, and the owner might go away for ten years, and find it more beautiful than ever on his return” (*WG* 16-17). Robinson thus challenges the reader-gardener to build new ecologies out of existing and disregarded ones—to make aesthetic choices under the expectation of eventually having to relinquish control of the garden. Once the garden is “[a]rranged,” the gardener may allow ten years’ of wilderness and the



accumulation of waste to take over in order to complete the aesthetic work. The source of attraction in this arrangement is the way in which human cultivation eventually relinquishes its interference to the wild, which transforms the slope into a self-sustaining plant ecology. As a practice that necessitates human labour and design, gardening is anthropocentric, certainly. Even the self-sufficient ten-year garden that Robinson proposes relies in its early years on the gardener to plant and to maintain it “with some judgment at first.” And yet, though an anthropocentric bias is inevitable, Robinson’s uncompromising focus upon ecologies almost approaches the posthuman. The gardener seeks to develop the self-sufficiency of a garden ecology enough that it could eventually exist without the labour and arrangement of that gardener. The aim of the gardener’s work—to develop the self-sufficiency, permanence, and botanical strength of the garden ecology—in other words, is to make human labour obsolete.

There is a similar abandonment of design at play when Robinson discusses horticultural uses of decayed architecture. In both *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens* (1870) and *The Wild Garden*, Robinson recommends “ruins and old walls” for naturalizing certain alpine plants, not only because these imitate the physical conditions of the plants’ native environment, but also because the plants will “be *seen* to greater advantage on them than in any other positions” (*WG* 33, emphasis added). There is aesthetic merit in the decay of a wall. Indeed, for Robinson, ruins or partially decayed walls outperform any constructs expressly made for the purpose; “A mossy old wall, or an old ruin, would afford a position for many dwarf rock-plants which no specially prepared situation could rival” (*AF* 34). The wilderness has effectively improved upon the architectural and horticultural work begun by human endeavour. Being both useful to plant life and beautiful, these mossy walls and ruins exemplify the central argument of *The Wild Garden*: neglected spaces that simultaneously integrate the refuse of different garden spaces into new waste ecologies and diminish the presence of the human have ideal ecological value.

## 4.2

For Robinson, there is one excusable form of extravagance: the expenditure of resources to secure and to maintain a large variety of thriving plant life. As he playfully remarks, “[i]f we ruin ourselves through extravagance in gardening, let it be for living and

beautiful things” (*EFG* 240). Robinson does not object to expenditure unless it interferes with the propagation of “living and beautiful things.” We see the logic of this one exception at play in a paragraph on “Stucco and Stone Waste” or the excessive terracing in gardens (*EFG* 240):

It is a costly folly to make a flower garden like a cemetery, with costly terracing work—where terraces are not required, and where the natural form of the earth is far fitter than any other form for a beautiful flower garden,—vases, fountain basins, sculpture of the poorer sort, and, lastly, pounded stones and gravel, set out instead of flowers,—these are wasteful and ugly. (*EFG* 240)

The true offence—what makes stucco and stone terraces “waste,” in this case—is that these building materials supplant the rightful domain of “a beautiful flower garden.” Robinson prioritizes plant life over human convenience and usage when he suggests that the resources directed toward “stone rubbish” be redirected toward “good plants and good ways of growing them.” In service of this larger argument, the author relies on redefinitions of waste. Invoking the image of a cemetery to figure garden pavement and decoration as waste, Robinson fuses his economic, aesthetic, and ecological objections. The practical obstacles of this “costly folly,” “where terraces are not required,” merge with that aesthetic bent which prefers “the natural form of the earth” to “sculpture of the poorer sort,” as well as with his plant-centric animosity to the “pounded stones and gravel, set out instead of flowers.” And while these competing images of waste demonstrate how Robinson weaves economic, aesthetic, and ecological wastes together in his own horticultural methods, they rely on the foundational assumption that aestheticized botanical life is more valuable than an aestheticized human experience. Whatever role they might serve, humans do not take precedence in the Robinsonian garden. They are a temporary stay during the garden’s early development, a transient benefactor of sorts, but ultimately cannot join the garden ecology except in death, or as decay.

Robinson’s approach to the garden was scandalous and provocative because of the way in which he consistently undermined the value of human systems of order, just as his gardening method resisted the impulse toward dominion over the landscape. It is entirely

appropriate, therefore, that he adopts a language of waste when positing an ecological ethos that idealizes the receding of human agency and presence. Robinson's stance toward the place of the human in the garden is deeply ambivalent. At times, the garden's ecologies depend on human labour and management; at other times, there is an apocalyptic strain to his language that suggests the only proper place for the human in the garden is in death. There is a certain posthuman perspective implied by botanical beauty in that it is visible only to "the eyes of water-snakes and frogs." The remainder of this chapter considers Robinson's ultimately morbid conception of the appropriate place of the human in the garden, beginning with some particulars of how he prioritizes ecological development and ending with an examination of the cemetery-garden.

Robinson engages with this grim, inevitable conclusion by recommending urn cemeteries, which double as flower gardens. This is the central concept of *God's Acre Beautiful; Or, the Cemeteries of the Future*, in which Robinson argues for adopting cremation as the dominant mode of burying human remains. It is fitting that Robinson should prefer cremation, which accelerates the decomposition of human remains and hastens toward the point at which these remains might be serviceable to garden cemetery ecology. Cremation was a relatively uncommon practice in 1880s England, and with urban real estate becoming increasingly scarce, spaces for full casket burials in large cities like London were at a premium. Cemetery over-crowding and its dangers to sanitation were a well-publicized issue by the time that Robinson wrote *God's Acre Beautiful*, such that Robinson spends less time dwelling on these issues and focuses instead on the unique horticultural and aesthetic opportunities afforded by urn cemeteries. While others have already supplied the sanitary arguments for urn-burial, his book examines such cemeteries from the perspective "of the beauty of nature and art, which an improved system of burial would make possible in all that relates to the resting-place of the dead" (*GAB* 1).

Robinson suggests that the responsibility of cultivating the garden ecology is much stronger for its being a cemetery: "[t]he cemetery of the future must not only be a garden in the best sense of the word, but the most beautiful and best cared-for of all gardens" (*GAB* 6-7). Through the interment of ashes, human remains may enable further garden

spaces to exist. Of course, Robinson is not proposing to use human ashes to fertilize gardens; however, he does intend for urn cemeteries to secure spaces for more flower gardens. He imagines that, because “the place for urn-burials need not occupy more than a fourth of the space of a large cemetery, the whole central or main part would be free space for gardens and groves of trees” (*GAB* 6). With the urns occupying at most a quarter of the space, this imagined cemetery would be far more garden and grove than burial ground. Though three years later Robinson would write that it is “a costly folly to make a flower garden like a cemetery” (*EFG* 240), he evidently thinks it worthwhile to make a cemetery like a flower garden.

Human remains cease to be “waste” or to be wasted in joining the garden-cemetery, in which they are the prerequisites for that garden’s existence. In the casket burial cemetery, however, human remains not only create waste *ab initio* by making otherwise valuable land useless; they also become organic waste as they decompose and, perhaps eventually, they are dug up and discarded as refuse in order to accommodate new buildings for the living. Robinson evokes the full force these layered cycles of waste when he describes urban casket cemeteries as “the very image of decay” (*GAB* 8)—as waste that bars garden-cemeteries from being realized. Robinson is referring to the impossibility of long-term maintenance where the conventional cemetery of interred caskets is concerned. The author goes on for some length to describe what is effectively the unsustainability of these cemeteries:

The history of many graveyards in crowded cities is this: Comparatively few years’ accumulation of bodies, say from one to two generations, then finally closing from overcrowding. A generation or two passes away; many changes occur among those interested in preserving the graves, and soon their voice is heard no more in the matter. Then, at the will of some one or more persons desirous of disposing of a place which, frequently, is extremely valuable, at any moment the remains of every person buried therein are liable to be subjected to the utmost degradation; to be carted away as secretly as may be by some contractor, whose only object is to find a convenient shoot for them. (*GAB* 2-3)

This nightmarish vision of bodies irreverently “carted away” and thrown, as rubbish, into “a convenient shoot” is one of a plundered landscape. Reading these concerns for the “disposing” or disruption of historic burial grounds occupying desirable real estate, we may recall Tsing’s schema of the abandoned landscape. The abandoned landscape, alienated as a space valued narrowly for a single resource, is depleted of that resource and left in a state of seeming ruin—“subjected to the utmost degradation,” perhaps. This comparison, of course, is not complete. Stolen cemetery grounds might be alienated, but with the result of being occupied by new bodies rather than being abandoned; the act of appropriation here would not lead directly to the depletion of the cemetery’s value as an economic commodity (i.e., as real estate). Tsing, moreover, is interested in the unexpected ecologies that assert themselves out of such ruins. Robinson’s cautionary examples are less radical, and possibly constrained by a subtle form of alienation. It is worth noting that Robinson, who views the cemetery as a potential botanical resource, might simply be exchanging one form of alienation for another.

Robinson judges the cemetery as he would the garden ecology; one might go so far as to say that he is an ecological thinker, assessing the long-term sustainability of the garden-cemetery. We can see in both his references to the history of graveyards, and to graveyards multiple generations in the future, that Robinson’s assessment of cemeteries is based on its longevity. Robinson’s underlying concerns are the inevitable result of a logic that views the cemetery as a sacred space for botanical life that would maximize the cemetery’s ecological potential. When he complains that the “frequent disturbance of the ground for interments is against any good work in such art as the place invites” (*GAB* 9), Robinson makes clear that he sees both casket-interment and the forms of robbery that casket cemeteries attract as unnecessary interruptions to the growth cycles of what could be a thriving garden ecology. There are limits, in other words, to Robinson’s appreciation for decay. Decay is acceptable in the garden-cemetery if it supports or enables a functional ecology, just as plant decay is also kept from being waste as long as it contributes to the botanical ecologies of the flower garden. A closed cemetery in London, with little vegetation and whose “memorial stones are crumbling away, although this is one of the best cared for of closed cemeteries” (*GAB* 9), is a waste of what should be both a sacred and a botanical space.

For Robinson, what distinguishes objectionable waste from decay is something like an ecological entropy—its movement from a state of complexity to a state of simplicity. The types of human artifice that Robinson opposes—carpet bedding, gravel paving, ceramic edgings, dug-up borders, even interred bodies—involve a similar structural interference that exchanges complex ecological structures for simplistic ones. Plant decay, by contrast, brings more structural complexity to ecological spaces of which it is a part; it nourishes the soil and assists new growth. The gardener's work is to try to approximate that structural complexity between the diverse spaces of landscapes. Instead of surrendering the space of the cemetery to gravestones, *God's Acre Beautiful* proposes to increase the cemetery's ecological complexity, minimizing the space needed for burials and maximizing the area devoted to botanical growth.

What preserves urn cemeteries from the fate of interred-casket cemeteries is the longevity enabled by a sustainable integration of human remains into the garden-cemetery ecology. "While long duration is not possible under our present system," Robinson observes, "with urn-burial the simplest stone inscription may be in as good order a thousand years hence as today. With it also there would be a satisfactory realisation of the meaning conveyed by the word cemetery—a resting-place, or place of sleep, for the dead" (*GAB* 8). Not least of the urn cemetery's benefits is its jointly ecological and aesthetic appeal. The ecological strength, the fecundity of the garden-cemetery, is beautiful. Robinson assures us that "[w]ith urn-burial everything we can desire for the artist is not only possible but easily attained. Soft, green, undisturbed lawns; stately and beautiful trees in many forms; ground undisturbed, except in certain small parts" (*GAB* 13-14). The garden-cemetery is yet another ecology of ecologies, balancing diverse "small parts," from decorative columbarium, to grove, and to "soft, green, undisturbed lawns"—the last of which, we may hope, the caretaker would presume to mow only on occasion.

## Conclusion

### 5

It seems fitting to devote the ending of this dissertation on waste ecologies to a discussion of endings themselves. Critics and readers alike are apt to imagine waste as an ending. And to do so is reasonable; waste tends to refer to an outcome of a set of processes. Within a logic of linear progression, waste appears to be the inevitable end point of living and nonliving things. Once-valuable commodities are thrown out in dust-heaps and bodies end up as (occasionally charred) remains. Where the waste-land once meant uncultivated land, the industrial nineteenth century shifted our idea of a waste-land to resemble Anna Tsing's alienated landscape, which, as she points out, emerges as depleted land or a landscape whose primary use value has been spent. In many ways, waste stands for material and teleological endings. Yet, for Victorians, waste stood for beginnings, as well. Over the course of my four chapters I have been working against these assumptions of waste as mere by-product, as capitalist residue. Instead, I have examined some of the ways in which Victorian fiction and prose explore the narrative possibilities that emerge from imagining waste as the slippery substances that elude our carefully constructed systems, as well as from conceiving waste ecologies as the thoroughly interrelated structural organization of that waste. Waste in the sense of detritus becomes the centre of families' existence (the Harmons, the Boffins, and the Hexams) in the first chapter; it is a resource that can be mined. Even more strangely, waste can be so rampantly productive that, as we see in the second chapter, it appears to proliferate endlessly and often at the expense of the individual. Perhaps most importantly of all, however, waste gives rise to new growth—whether of industrial matter, of organic life, or of narrative possibility.

Waste offers itself as a potential narrative point of origin. *A Christmas Carol*, for instance, opens with an image of spectral waste: "Marley was dead: to begin with" (1). The narrative begins with the fact of Marley's dead, decaying body. The corpse, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, is the ultimate form of human waste. The syntax and punctuation of this sentence, moreover, situate this waste in a productively unusual way. The syntactic deferral of the initiatory "to begin with" places the incitement of the

story after a death. The colon visually separates the two clauses, a demarcation of death and of life (i.e., a beginning) that Marley will later cross in ambiguous passage to communicate with the living. Yet, this colon is unnecessary. It bridges two clauses in no danger of grammatical separation, or which might just as easily be joined by a comma. As it is, the colon implies that there was a separation between the clauses that needed to be joined, and generates a semantic tension between the notions of death and of beginning. The strategic punctuation construes the incitement as a logical progression from that death and promises a future narrative development of this motif. Here, death and waste do not mark the close of a narrative, but an opening. A figure of waste, then, initiates the main narrative arcs of *A Christmas Carol*. Marley's redemption, his attempts to escape the purgatorial space within which he finds himself only begins after his death; his attempts to help Scrooge redeem himself must still begin with Marley's death as well. Waste, like death, gets associated with the conclusion of a linear progression, and yet in Dickens's short narrative it marks the starting point of spiritual phenomena. Even Scrooge's flippancy remark that Marley's ghost "may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato," and has an air "more of gravy than of grave" (27), conjures the rather absurd image of digestive waste as the source of—if not a ghost, then at least some alternate sensory state of awareness.

Literary genres throughout the nineteenth century recognized waste's capacity to produce and to organize narrative. Victorian detective and sensation fiction, for instance, rapidly developed a convention that associated apparent insignificance and hidden meaning. Waste, which included everything from the overlooked to the disgusting, was a natural fit for this convention. Wilkie Collins uses this tactic in *The Moonstone* (1868). A pivotal clue in the disappearance of the diamond—which Sergeant Cuff, Gabriel Betteredge, and Franklin Blake go to many lengths to track down and which Rosanna Spearman takes even more pains to secure—is a vestment of no practical value and which ruins the decorative value of Rachel's painted bedroom door: Franklin Blake's paint-smeared nightgown. Collins also resorts to this device in several of his shorter tales, including "The Diary of Anne Rodway" (1856). In this story, the narrator spots the central clue of the mystery at a local rag-and-bottle shop. She notices a torn cravat among a pile of rags, and correctly matches it to a torn strip of fabric found in her dead friend's hand:



Glancing about me here at the worthless-looking things by which I was surrounded, my eye was caught by a bundle of rags lying on the counter, as if they had just been brought in and left there. From mere idle curiosity, I looked close at the rags, and saw among them something like an old cravat. . . . I looked at the ends: one of them was torn off. (32)

Anne Rodway stumbles upon pivotal evidence as a result of her attentiveness to waste. That attention is more significant as “mere idle curiosity” for suggesting that her gaze is drawn to waste for its own sake, without ulterior motive. A disposition toward waste (the “idle curiosity” that wastes time) leads her to look closely at waste (“worthless-looking things”), which in turn allows her to discover a type of waste (an unusable, torn cravat) that turns out to be all-important. Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories are even better known for immortalizing this device of placing immense narrative value in the discarded or discardable. Of the many stories in which discarded rubbish or stained items prove invaluable as evidence, some include: the dirt-stained knees of Vincent Spaulding’s trousers in “The Adventure of the Red-Headed League” (1892); and the “dregs of beeswing” (330) that alert Holmes to Lady Brackenstall’s attempt to screen the man who killed her husband in “The Abbey Grange” (1905). These familiar tropes of detective fiction rely on waste’s interconnectedness; waste has the double advantage of appearing too insignificant to the criminal to be preserved, and of retaining the material traces of a crime that can be legible for the attentive investigator. There are also instances in this genre of waste begetting more waste. In Conan Doyle’s “The Musgrave Ritual” (1894), for instance, the mystery begins with a paper copy of questions and answers that Reginald Musgrave describes as “nothing of any importance at all” (107). This “absurd business” (110) leads to a series of events over which Holmes accrues material clues that he later keeps as souvenirs. He shows Watson these relics at the beginning of the story, years after he had solved the case, and they appear to Watson as rubbish: “a crumpled piece of paper, an old-fashioned brass key, a peg of wood with a ball of string attached to it, and three rusty old discs of metal” (101). The rubbish or waste in question has grown in number from the beginning to the end of Holmes’s involvement in this case. Moreover, they still carry on as waste. Holmes shows these relics to Watson to distract the latter from his desire that Holmes should tidy his documents. Watson remarks on Holmes’s habit of hoarding evidence, remarking: “his papers were my great crux. He had a horror

of destroying documents, especially those which were connected with his past cases” (99). And, indeed, instead of putting papers away, Holmes persuades Watson to let him take other significant papers out. Even here, in the context of genre fiction, waste is hyper-productive of new meaning.

Ghost stories and detective fiction are not the only genres to put the generative potential of waste to narrative uses. Social problem novels also feature narrative structures that make waste productive. Within a genre “defined by its dirtiness,” texts like Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848) rely on “transgressively graphic accounts of filth and waste” as impetuses for reform (Freeland 799). If dirt was emblematic of the social conditions which Gaskell and fellow Condition of England authors wished to see resolved, it was because their Victorian readership recognized waste as a formidable argument for social and political change. In addition, there was a further dimension to the productive influence of literal waste such as dirt and dust. Richard H. Horne’s short story, “Dust; or Ugliness Redeemed” (1850), which most critics agree inspired the Harmon dust-heaps in *Our Mutual Friend*,<sup>48</sup> offers a vivid account of how dust-heaps are productive of both financial gain and a folkloric, restorative power. Catherine Gallagher, comparing the transformative capacity of revitalizing dryness and life-threatening wetness, reads both Horne’s and Dickens’s dust-heaps as emblems of “the revivifying potential of all of life’s remains” (108). Karen Chase and Michael Levenson also notice the vitality underlying Dickens’s portrayals of waste, finding that the “primal matter” of grit, dust, and mud throughout Dickensian London “give a startling specificity to his engagement with the environment; they also place the question of material regeneration in stark and urgent terms” (144). This current of generative, productive literary waste reveals the structural complexity of Victorian waste more broadly. Waste was and is a point of origin that accommodates a surprising range of relations, including and beyond that which we hold abject. While Horne’s dust-heaps do feature in *Our Mutual Friend*,

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<sup>48</sup> According to Catherine Gallagher, critics have generally agreed that Horne’s story was the original inspiration for *Our Mutual Friend* at least as early as the 1980s, when the similarity was first by noted Humphrey House and then developed more fully by Frank Gibbon.

they were historically productive of agricultural fields, parks, and even of building materials for the reconstruction of Moscow, if Horne's "authentic information" (384) about a dust-heap sold for forty-thousand pounds to Russia for that purpose is to be believed.

The four chapters of this dissertation rely on a foundational view of waste as productive—productive of cyclical, complex, interrelated structures that I have been calling waste ecologies. Each chapter not only explores a different set of scenarios wherein waste produces new and unpredictable relations, but also devotes considerable space to the ways in which Victorian individuals and populaces, real and imagined, have navigated and negotiated their agency within waste ecologies. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Lizzie Hexam and Pleasant Riderhood manage to negotiate their own respective places in harmony with waste ecologies, free from the encroachment of either the deadly influence of the Thames or of Venus's emporium of miscellanies. *Bleak House*, by contrast, presents a decidedly morbid view of individuals' endeavour to create value or meaning within waste ecologies in the form of Richard's psychological decline, Krook's bodily fusion to his wares, and Jo's forced and even contagious inability to find situatedness. "Green Tea" offers still bleaker prospects in Jennings, whose body and soul become the waste at the mercy of ecologies of indigestible tea, knowledge, and colonial revenge. Only after this decimation and receding of the human do Robinson's gardens offer some possibility of individuals' reintegration into generative waste ecologies—that is, in horticultural labour and in death. And yet, in spite of the apocalyptic tenor of these literary waste ecologies, my hope is that this dissertation on waste nevertheless marks a beginning and not an end. I offer these chapters as openings into further discussions of Victorian waste as productive, as fascinating, and as rich sites of analysis. Waste is a beginning that promises more—future narrative developments, rampant new material relations, and strange ecologies of waste.

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